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THE USES
OF
CREEDS & CONFESSIONS.



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Uses of Creeds and Confessions of Faith.

THE
USES OF CREEDS
AND
CONFESSIONS OF FAITH.

BY
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"Hold fast the form of sound words."

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PREFATORY NOTE.

It has recently become fashionable to declaim against Creeds and Confessions of Faith, and to denounce all the Symbolical Books of what have been called "The Articled Churches."

There is reason to believe that this hostility to authorised formularies of Christian doctrine springs from a latent and unavowed, but deep-seated and inveterate, dislike to distinct and definite Articles of Faith.

To such an extent has this feeling carried some ardent but unsettled minds, that, not content with the old distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental truths, they have boldly denied that the belief of *any* truth was necessary to salvation, or involved in a Christian profession. A melancholy instance of this occurs in a letter of Blanco White to Mr Martineau, in which he says—"To declare any one unworthy of the name of Christian because he does not agree with your *belief*, is to fall into the intolerance of the Articled Churches. The moment that the name *Christian* is made necessarily to contain in its signification belief in certain historical or metaphysical propositions, that

moment *the name itself becomes a Creed*; the length of the Creed is of little consequence. In vain will it be said that according to this view, the signification of the word Christianity may be reduced to a kind of negative quantity: such an objection assumes the great point in question,—namely that Christ left a *positive Creed* to be indispensably accepted by all his disciples. Until such a fact shall be proved no man has a right to reject another from the Christian union, on account of *any abstract opinion whatever*. . . . It is the *priestly spirit*, the spirit of hierarchical association which has attached the idea of *assent to certain dogmas* to the name of *Christian*.”*

Nor is this a solitary instance of such extreme opinions even in this enlightened age. We have another in Mr Hennell, who holds that Revelation is effete,—that Christianity is dead or dying, but maintains, nevertheless, that those who believe neither in a historical Christ, nor a historical Gospel may and should call themselves Christians. “Miracle and prophecy are losing their influence over the minds of men At the same time, whatever of real moral value was contained in Christianity and its records may be retained; nor does the important modification of opinions alluded to, appear even to bring with it the necessity of running counter to the feelings of this age and country by a renunciation of *the Christian name*. . . . It may be asked why, on the hypothesis of imperfect views and mixed motives on the part of the Founder of Christianity, this age should be inclined to render him any allegiance whatever and to connect his name more than those of many other

* MARTINEAU'S “Rationale of Religious Enquiry,” Appendix, 108.

reformers, possibly more wise and enlightened, with the cause of human improvement? If he were not God, nor the Son of God, nor a prophet, nor even the wisest philosopher or most perfect moral being that we can conceive of; if he were, in fact, only a Jewish peasant of intellect, imagination, and moral feeling, much, although not immeasurably, above the standard of his age and country, why should his name be enshrined more than those of many other philanthropists, which would now be scarcely recognised by any but the students of biographical dictionaries? Because the Christian system, in addition to such intrinsic excellence as it possesses, has been long interwoven with some of the best affections of mankind, and has been forced upon their notice by a striking series of events. . . . He also stood forth as a public Reformer,—opposed his own more liberal spirit to the bigotry of his time,—arrested men's attention by assuming the remarkable character of Messiah, and died a martyr." But no faith is necessary either in the history or the doctrines of the Gospel. "Even those more liberal Christians, who have been willing to admit that many different opinions might co-exist within the pale of Christianity, have generally taken it for granted that a *belief in its miraculous origin* at least was essential. But a close attention to the history of Jesus Christ will shew that this distinction is perfectly arbitrary; and that a *total disbelief* of miracles and prophecy no more disqualifies a man for bearing with propriety and consistency *the Christian name*, than any other deduction from the exuberant belief which places him in the Triune Godhead."*

* HENWELL'S "Christian Theism," pp. 1, 2, 14.

According to this class of writers, the Christian name implies no belief, and no profession of belief, in any one fact or doctrine of the Christian scheme ; but they are not the only assailants of authorized Creeds and systematic Confessions of Faith. There is a class of Christian men, holding Evangelical views, and entitled to be regarded as sincere and even zealous defenders of "the faith once delivered to the saints," who look on all accredited Articles of Faith with a jealous and jaundiced eye, and are not slow to denounce every conscientious adherent to the symbolical books of the Church as a slave to the mere letter of human systems, and a stranger to the free spirit of the Gospel. The avowed hostility of such men to *certain* Creeds and Confessions, or to certain uses which have been made of them, especially in the way of subscription, might possibly be accounted for, without imputing to them a dislike to all distinct and definite statements of Divine truth, by ascribing it either to their distaste for the peculiarities of particular systems,—such as the Athanasian and the Calvinistic,—or to their doubts as to the lawfulness or expediency of imposing any test even on the Office-bearers of the Christian Church. But in the former case, they are not opposing Creeds and Confessions in general, they are only objecting to some distasteful peculiarities of certain systems, and, for ought we know, they may be ready to produce a *system of their own*, in the hope that it may take the place of those which they decry ; and in the latter they are pleading only against a particular and subordinate use of such formularies, while they overlook, or make little account of, the far more general purposes which they are

fitted to serve, and which they have actually served in the past history of the Church.

In a recent number of the *North British Review*, we find an example of the views to which we now refer. In an article on the writings of that "old man eloquent"—the revered and lamented Chalmers—the writer, himself a Christian man, holding Evangelical sentiments, assails in no measured terms the National Theology of Scotland, and especially the influence of her Calvinistic Confession. How he might have felt, had a Scotchman attacked the Thirty-nine Articles, or even hinted at any supposed defect in the Universities or Church of England, we cannot tell; but we read his remarks on the Theology and Creed of Scotland with heart-felt regret. He goes so far as to impute the prevalence of infidelity among the literary classes during the last century to the repulsive doctrines of Calvinism, and even to excuse, if not to justify, the unbelief which the National Creed was fitted to generate. "More than a few," he says, "of that antagonist host would have gladly accepted *Christian Truth*, if only it had been presented to them in its purity, as severed from *the National Creed*." He speaks of "a service on the side of Christianity so needful, and yet so rarely attempted, viz., to present the Truth apart from the Creed. How urgent this necessity is, as related to the Christianity of Scotland,—where the close adhesion of the Creed to the Truth,—the entombing of the Truth within the Creed,—has in modern times forced so many of her choicest minds into a position of antagonism, whether open or latent, to the latter." He tells us that "Scotland,—and England too, in a different sense,—yet waits the advent of one equal

to her own Chalmers in grandeur of soul, and in more energy, who shall take up the work of her renovation at the point where he left it unattempted, and shall give her at length a Christianity far larger than any Confession, and burdened with no burdens that are of man's devising." He goes so far as to affirm that "Chalmers found himself on the battle-field opposed to men with whom the rejection of Christianity,—such as it had always been offered to them,—was, we may say, an inevitable consequence of the free development of thought in strong minds." "How was it," he asks, "that in Scotland, notwithstanding the strictly religious discipline through which all men had passed in their boyhood, how came it that so many of its brightest and strongest intellects had forsaken the religion of their early homes, and had, some of them, become the apostles of Atheism—noted as such throughout Europe? An inquiry of this sort had not presented itself to Chalmers' mind," but if it had, "he would have given his great strength to the more hopeful task of ridding his country and its Church of the thraldoms imposed upon them in a dark and evil age." "We could have wished him to loosen by a little the tightness of those logical Theologies, which framed as they were in a disputatious age, have now the effect of debarring us from the free and fearless enjoyment of Holy Scripture. . . . He did not, as we think, clearly discern what those hindrances are, connected with systematic, polemical, and logical Theology, which stand in the way of our thus obtaining possession of Christianity in its amplitude of meaning." "We do not know that his writings contain so much as a single passage, conveying an *explicit*

dissent from those copious and elaborate canons of belief,—the Westminster Confession and the Larger Catechism.”

The promulgation of such sentiments in a Journal originated by Dr Welsh, and associated with the name of Chalmers himself as a frequent contributor to its pages, seems to impose an imperative obligation on their successors, if they be like-minded with them, to uphold the banner which they unfurled, and to defend the sacred cause in which they gloried. The Principal of the New College,—the successor, in different departments, both of Welsh and Chalmers,—has already raised his powerful voice in vindication of the National Faith. But it may be useful, and cannot be deemed unseasonable, to reproduce, in present circumstances, the masterly treatise of Professor Dunlop, which discusses, on its general merits, the whole question as to the several Ends and Uses of Creeds and Confessions ;—a treatise, old but not obsolete, and which, although written early in the last century, still retains a standard value, as the ablest and most comprehensive defence which has ever appeared of the Symbolical Books of the Church.

The Author, William Dunlop, Professor of Divinity and Church History in the University of-Edinburgh, was the son of William Dunlop, Principal of the University of Glasgow, an eminent public character at the end of the seventeenth century. After prosecuting his studies for a time at Glasgow, he repaired to Utrecht, with the intention of studying Law, but by the advice of Mr Wishart he abandoned it, and became Professor of Divinity and Church History at Edinburgh in 1716. He was a popular preacher, and three volumes of his Sermons were published. He pro-

jected and executed a valuable "Collection of Creeds and Confessions"—still much esteemed, but extremely rare and high-priced. To this Collection he prefixed an admirable Essay on the Ends and Uses of such Formularies—which was afterwards printed separately; and the present reprint is taken from the third edition of that Essay which appeared in 1775. Professor Dunlop was a young man of high promise, but his career was short—he died in 1720, at the early age of twenty-eight.

The discussion of the subject by Archdeacon Blackburne in "The Confessional" relates mainly to the Use of Confessions as Tests of orthodoxy, and the right of requiring subscription to them. It takes little notice of the more general and important ends which they are fitted to serve, and which Professor Dunlop has admirably illustrated. Many seem, indeed, to think of them in no other light than as Tests, imposed by authority, and too often employed for political or party objects. Hence the prejudice with which they are generally regarded—a prejudice founded on the abuse and perversion of Creeds, and which may be most effectually dissipated by presenting a clear and comprehensive account of the other important ends for which they were designed.

The whole body and substance of the treatise is now reprinted, but a few strictures on the "Marrow of Modern Divinity" are omitted for the reason stated at p. 186; the Latin quotations are translated into English; and the Acts of Parliament and Assembly are transferred to the Appendix.

EDITOR.

THE USES OF CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS OF FAITH.

At a time when Creeds and Confessions of Faith are so generally decried, and not only exposed to contempt, as useless inventions, without any force and efficacy to promote the interests of truth and religion, but loaded, by many writers of distinguished wit and learning, with the most fatal and dangerous consequences, and represented as one of the most plentiful sources of those angry debates, and fierce contentions, which have for so many ages distracted the Christian Church—we thought it might be of some use, to give a short account of the end and design of compositions of this nature, and of the chief purposes which the Christian Churches intended to promote in framing and publishing their several Confessions. And it is hoped these will be found to be so considerable for their number and value, as to convince the impartial reader, that there is no occasion for treating them with disdain or neglect ; and that we are justly to be excused, who retain a veneration and esteem of them, as works both founded on reason, and supported by many advantageous consequences.

And since Creeds in general are not only of late years undervalued as mean and useless, but exclaimed against as unjust, arbitrary, and inconsistent in their frame and tendency with the liberty of mankind, and the noble freedom of the

Christian faith—we shall endeavour to vindicate the present practice of the Church of Scotland, and the use which she at least makes of her Confession,—wipe off the aspersions which have been thrown on her by writers, who, how justly soever valued on many accounts, yet appear not thoroughly acquainted with our constitution, or perhaps not altogether impartial in their sentiments of it,—and, lastly, we shall answer some of the most plausible objections which have been made against the using Confessions as a means of preserving the Christian doctrine from impure mixtures, and of preventing the breaking in of heresies and disorder into the Church. After all which, it will be easier to determine, if they ought to be accounted arbitrary impositions, and destructive engines of spiritual tyranny, and the lust of power over the consciences of men ; or if they be not rather very consistent with all the privileges and freedoms of a man, or a Christian.

The several purposes which the churches designed to promote by their Confessions, may be reduced to these three.

I. Some of them were of a very general and extensive design ; having a regard, not only to the whole body of Christians, but to all men, even their enemies, who had any knowledge of them.

II. Other uses of these Confessions peculiarly respected the ministers of the Gospel, who were obliged to declare their assent to the doctrines contained in them.

III. Confessions of Faith were also designed for purposes of a more extensive nature than the second, and yet not so general as the first class ; namely, such as respected the whole body of the people, as well as the ministers ; but were particularly calculated for the members of that Church to which the Confession belonged, and had a special regard to them, more than to the whole world, or to other Christians who were members of other Churches.

In examining a little these things, we shall have occasion to consider all that is proper to be observed in a work of this nature.

PART I.

THOSE PURPOSES OF CONFESSIONS WHICH WERE OF THE MOST GENERAL AND EXTENSIVE NATURE, AND HAD A REGARD, NOT ONLY TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PARTICULAR CHURCHES WHICH FRAMED THEM, BUT TO THE WHOLE WORLD.

FIRST, Some ends of Creeds and Confessions were of a general and extensive nature ; being intended to reach, not only the whole Christian Church, but to make an impression on the world round about it, which maintained a different religion. And of this sort there were several considerable designs in view.

I. That which seems to have been most directly intended by the several Churches who have framed Confessions, was to publish a fair and authentic account of the doctrine which they maintained, whereby a just idea of their religion might be given to the world,—who so frequently mistake or misrepresent the opinions of one another,—and the aspersions and calumnies that were thrown upon it by adversaries might be wiped off. This was one main end of the Creeds composed by the primitive Church, and by our fathers at the Reformation ; and it is a purpose that our Confession is very necessary to.

There are too frequent occasions to observe, that all sects and parties are biassed by undue prejudices against one another. Self-love, which is so deeply interwoven with our natures in this degenerate state of things, and shows its

power in the whole train of our thoughts and actions, insensibly determines us to entertain a fond opinion of any scheme or party which we are engaged in, and to look at it in a flattering, though it should be a false, light ;—and at the same time to take up mistaken notions of our adversaries, impute absurd opinions to them which they never entertained, and paint the errors they may have been really led astray by to the disadvantage, and more crooked and deformed than the life. And as this inhuman and uncharitable treatment of one another is owing rather to the temper of our minds, than any particular principles of the doctrine which we embrace, it may be equally charged upon persons of every side, who have not learned to subdue their own spirit, nor endeavoured to govern their passions by reason, and sweetened their tempers by humility, and meekness, and charity ; virtues which have become as admirable for their rareness, as for their excellency.

It is this which, amongst the numberless crowd of authors, makes it so very difficult to find one that does justice to an adversary, or treats his person with gentleness, or even good manners, and his opinions with an open and candid impartiality ; and those who have been at all acquainted with controversy, will find it the hardest thing for two warm disputants, when struggling hard for victory, not to throw about that dirt, whereby if they cannot overthrow, they are sure to blacken and bespatter, each other.

But as truth of every kind has most reason to complain of this inhuman usage, the Christian religion, during its tender years, was in a peculiar measure exposed to all its fury and barbarity. Its blessed Author was assaulted, both by the tongues and the hands of his implacable enemies : they reviled him by calumny, while they persecuted him by force ; and when they crucified and tormented his body, they insulted him with the most bitter reproaches, and endeavoured to blacken his memory and doctrine by the falsest aspersions. Thus the apostles and primitive Christians were exposed to contempt, as the off-scourings of all things, and to popular hatred and anger, as movers of sedition, and enemies to the public peace,—besides all which, their religion, as well as their persons, was in like manner defamed.

The doctrines and precepts of the holy Jesus were founded on so many convincing reasons, and supported by such amazing miracles ; they were so admirably suited to the dignity of human nature, the peace and happiness of mankind, and to all the great interests and the most enlarged desires of an immortal spirit, and, at the same time, in every respect worthy of the Supreme Being ; that they could scarce have missed to make their way into the esteem and love of mankind, and be professed at least, if not practised, by the world, if they had been fairly represented, and set in a just light. There needed nothing to gain this end but what the Apologist mentions, *Unum gestit ne ignorata damnetur*. Christianity desires no favour of its judges, but that they be careful to understand it. Upon this account, amongst all the arts of hell, none seemed more effectual to stop its progress, or maintain the kingdom of darkness and the idolatry of the blinded nations, than falsehood and misrepresentation ; by which not only the glory of Christianity might be obscured, and men kept from seeing the beauties and excellencies of that religion in their native light and purity, but it would likewise be exposed to public view, disguised with a false face, which was rendered as deformed and monstrous as calumny and reproach could make it—that so the world might be determined in their opinion thereof, not by what it was really in itself, but by the quite contrary idea, that the lying malice of hell, and the impetuous passions of its votaries, gave of the doctrine and disciples of the Messiah. So that the least acquaintance with the history of the Church will convince us, that though the power of the Roman empire, the learning and sophistry of philosophers, and the persuasive allurements of wit and eloquence, were all employed in fighting with the greatest fury against the kingdom of our Messiah ; yet calumny was still the most successful engine used by the devil in this infernal war. From this quarter the most violent assaults were made ; and the father of lies was the character he acted under with the greatest malice and dexterity, and whereby he gave force and vigour to his other instruments. It is indeed surprising to think, how far he prevailed, and what notions the people generally were impressed with. They not only despised the professors of

Christianity as mean and ignorant ; persecuted them as enemies to the laws, and disturbers of order and government ; but fancied them to be the most impious and flagitious sect that had ever appeared in the world, without the least remains of honour and virtue : no crime so black, but it was charged on them ; nor any lusts and pleasures so unnatural and filthy, but they were thought guilty of them. Their assemblies for divine worship were traduced as rendezvous of villany and debauchery ; and the celebration of the Holy Sacrament itself was held forth as a more horrid and frightful ceremony than any of the mysteries of Bacchus or Venus, and as a rite designed to initiate men into the dissolute practice of every impurity and abomination. And all this was represented as the tendency and design of their religion, as we are at large informed by the writers of the first ages ; and particularly by that beautiful and elegant work of Minutius Fœlix, the admirable Octavius, where these diabolical calumnies are fully explained and refuted. So that, considering the scandalous notion the people had got of Christians, it was not so much the thing as the name which they persecuted. When their character was so blackened and defaced, no wonder that it became odious and contemptible ; and when they were clothed with the skin of a ravenous tiger, the devil easily prevailed on the blinded world to rid themselves of them ; and *Christianos ad leones* was the natural consequence of the idea which had been received of them.

In such circumstances, it was necessary, to the honour of their religion, and that justice which every man owes to his good name, for the Christians to give a fair representation of the nature and tendency of that religion which they had made choice of ; whereby the falsehood of all those hellish calumnies would become evident ; and the world must be convinced, that a religion calculated to promote virtue and purity, and advance the glory and happiness of our nature, to reconcile men to God, and unite their minds by the most disinterested love, and extensive charity, could never give the smallest countenance to any of those abominations which were charged upon its professors. And this was the more *necessary*, because those odious colours which had been put

upon Christianity, appeared the more plausible from the conduct of the Gnostics, and the other monsters which infested those times ; who—though they scarce retained one principle of our religion, and had formed the most impious and absurd schemes of doctrine, which were in all respects contradictory to it—yet they usurped the name of Christians ; and the Heathens, who knew little more of it but the name, confounded all together who bore it, and attributed to the whole the excesses of debauch and impurity which they saw these heretics abandon themselves to. It was therefore of the last consequence to the Church, to distinguish betwixt the Gnostics and themselves ; and show, that their principles and practice had nothing in common with those filthy brutish sects.

It was for this purpose, then, amongst others, that Creeds and Confessions were at the beginning framed, which gave a short summary of the principal articles of the Christian faith, and afforded every person the easiest access to form some notion of a Christian : and, it is hoped, in so far they sprung, neither from lust of power and spiritual pride, nor from a tyrannical dominion usurped over the consciences of men (which have been given out in this age as their only rise), but that their original was both just and necessary. It was for the same purpose that Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and others, published their Apologies for Christianity ; which, in so far, were of the same nature and tendency with Confessions ; though the condition of the Church at that time made it impracticable to frame such large accounts of their faith by common consent.

At the Reformation from the apostacy of the Antichristian church, the Papists used the same engines to obscure the light of the Gospel, and put a stop to its progress, as the Heathens had done formerly ; the same irreconcilable enmity to the glory of the Messiah's kingdom equally animating them both, and inspiring them with rage and falsehood. As the Pagans dealt by the Christians, so did they by the Reformers—abused their persons, and traduced the doctrines which they taught ; and not content to assault them with argument and violence, they defamed them by noisy calumnies. And however unjust and abominable any imputation was, they never scrupled

to charge it upon them, if thereby they could either incite the wrath of those in power, or stir up the furious zeal of the unthinking populace against them. Hence all the measures taken by our heroic forefathers, who threw off the Romish yoke, were represented as proceeding wholly from a contempt of all authority, and a disregard of the laws and orders, either of Church or State, and from a fond inclination to novelty, and to a dissolute life, that should have nothing to curb its extravagancies. They were exclaimed against as the persons "who turned the world upside down."

There was so much care taken to spread these falsehoods, and the matter was of so great importance, that it seems to have been the chief design of the several Confessions composed by the Reformed Churches to provide a remedy against this evil; which they endeavoured to do, by publishing to the world a plain and genuine account of the doctrines which they maintained,—of the springs whence the Reformation flowed, and of the purposes it aimed at,—that it might appear they were entirely different from the invidious representation their adversaries made of them, and that those were extremely imposed upon who credited their slanders.

For this end,—as the prefaces to many of the Protestant Confessions inform us,—they designed those compositions, that the Emperor, and other Princes under whom they lived, might discover how little ground there was for persecuting them as disturbers of the public peace, and enemies to magistracy; when, in the strongest manner, they taught its Divine original, and its absolute necessity to the happiness, or even being of any society. And though they exposed the tyranny of the Papacy, and strove to beget in their people such a value for the liberties of a Christian, as might make them abhor that insufferable bondage which the Roman Pontiff had enslaved the world into, they at the same time recommended obedience to those powers which are ordained of God, and embraced no principle that had the smallest tendency to licence and disorder.

They intended to show by their Confessions, that when they disclaimed the authority of the Antichristian church, undervalued its censures, and stood unshaken by the thunders of the Vatican, they were not moved by a hatred to

discipline, a spirit of sedition, nor a love of unrestrained pleasures ; but by a just regard to the honour of God, and the genuine designs of ecclesiastical government, and by a noble abhorrence of an usurpation upon the dominion of Christ in his own kingdom, and the liberties of his subjects ; and, in a word, that it might become evident, that the corruptions of Popery were grown to such an exorbitant height, and had so universally polluted the doctrine and worship of that church, that the grounds of their separation from that communion were of the utmost importance, and laid them under an absolute necessity openly to renounce it.

One thing also was directly aimed at by our fathers, that the world might see how different their doctrine was from the dreams and ravings of the Anabaptists, and other monstrous heretics, who acted so extravagant a part in Germany about the time of the Reformation.

We have spoken at greater length upon this end, which both the primitive Christians and the Reformed Churches proposed in framing of their creeds, because it is of very considerable importance with respect to the doctrine of our Church, and one thing that, it is hoped, may be gained by a tolerable acquaintance with our Confession. Never was there a Church whose principles were more unjustly misrepresented, and loaded with calumnies more distinguished for their blackness and their variety ; and consequently this use of a Confession, whereby a genuine account may be given of what we maintain, is become of the greatest necessity to us. For besides those slanders and reproaches which we share with all the Protestant Churches from our common enemies, there are many peculiar circumstances with relation to the state of religious matters in Britain, which gave rise to divisions of several kinds,—put an edge upon the spirits of parties violently animated against one another,—and occasioned the more calumnious misrepresentations of persons and doctrines.

Everybody knows in what unhappy distracted times the Westminster Assembly met, and composed that Confession of Faith, which has since been received and owned by the Church of Scotland, as containing the pure and uncorrupted doctrine of Christianity. The flames of a civil war raged at

that time through the whole nation, and there were few breasts which had not been heated and disordered thereby. Contention, revenge, hatred, and the other angry, uncharitable passions, had with most people got the mastery over the sweeter and gentler fruits of the Christian life, and universally prevailed. When things had come to so melancholy an extremity, that the sword was unsheathed, and the contending parties not only disputed, but fought,—there was little place, amidst the noise of arms, and the horrors of blood and violence, for meekness, love, a forbearance of one another, and a charitable construction of opinions and actions; nor were temper and moderation almost any where to be met with. The whole body was in a fever, and the fermented humours broke over all the bounds of reason and consideration, and the fierceness and rage of their battles mixed with and envenomed their disputes; and it may be without difficulty believed, that angry men would readily be tempted to blacken and calumniate the opinions of those whom they strove to destroy, and give the most odious colours to their doctrines, that might conduce to vilify and expose their persons.

Upon the one hand, such as were remarkably zealous for the Protestant cause, and the liberties of the people, were animated, by their affection to their country, and apprehensions of its danger, with the greater warmth against those who they thought betrayed it, or maintained principles that seemed to look towards Popery and arbitrary power, and made them both think and speak things of them that were perhaps carried too far, and more harsh and rigid than was reasonable. While, on the other side, uncharitable passions boiled over with no less violence. The pernicious designs of some who favoured Popery and tyranny enraged them against the most active and steady opposers thereof; and the clergy of the Church of England, whose power and dignities were very much lowered upon the prevailing of the Parliament, and many of whom were turned out of their livings, were no doubt extremely disgusted, and moved with resentment, against such as they fancied the authors of their misfortunes, and got their spirits gradually soured by the *usage they met with*. This naturally made them entertain

the worse opinion of every thing that came from the side of the Parliament; and, amongst others, the Presbyterians, who had generally gone that way, had a large share of their unfavourable thoughts. So that, beside the questions immediately in debate, the doctrines which they embraced, and the Confession of Faith framed by the Westminster Assembly, upon that very account that they were theirs, became odious. The blackest and most injurious notions thereof were indulged, and the contrary principles eagerly received and propagated.

When public affairs were in so disordered a condition,—the government, both of Church and State, fluctuating and unstable,—and the various humours and passions of men in a preternatural heat, there arose a great number of different sects and parties. Giddy, designing, or ambitious persons, would fix upon nothing, but set up for authors of new schemes, run down the old principles of religion, and dreamed fancies of their own, which they then freely propagated; and found too many weak and unsettled enough to follow such blind and perverse leaders; as *Quakers*, *Antinomians*, *Fifth-monarchy-men*, *Muggletonians*, and others, whose names were as harsh and barbarous, as their doctrines were destructive of all government, and contradictory to the plainest rudiments of religion.

Now though these sects were indeed as different from the Fathers of our Church as they were from the Episcopal party, and pursued them with an equal hatred; yet, because at the beginning all of them joined in maintaining the public liberties, and opposing the measures of the King, which appeared arbitrary, and inconsistent with the just privileges of Parliament, their adversaries jumbled and confounded them all together; and while they considered them as one party, whatever extravagancy was advanced by any visionary sect, was without scruple charged upon the whole, and improved to render all equally odious and despicable, under the common denomination of *Fanatics*; though, with not much more reason, than if all the absurdities of Popery should be charged upon the English, because Britain and Spain were once confederated to bring down the exorbitant power of France; and with the same justice that so ovqo-

site things as Rome and Geneva have been often of late joined together by some passionate ignorant writers.

One thing also contributed not a little to the unworthy sentiments entertained of our fathers—that there was no care taken to distinguish betwixt the beginning, progress, and end of the civil wars, nor betwixt the persons who acted, and the springs of management during those different periods, though they were not only distinct, but frequently contrary to one another. The Parliament, and their adherents through the nation, were impressed, by a train of unhappy events, with a deep conviction, that in order to preserve the sinking State, and the decaying interests of the Reformation, from utter ruin, it was absolutely necessary to make a vigorous resistance to the imperious designs of the Court, which had of a long time been fondly grasping at a tyrannical domination—and to put a stop to the innovating principles and bold attempts of some high-church Prelates, which seemed to lead us back again to Rome, and sap the foundations of the Protestant faith.

As this was the rise of the civil war, it is certain, that many were engaged in it who proposed only to maintain liberty, and give a due life and vigour to the laws; to reform abuses, remove Papists, and evil counsellors; and to establish things on such a firm and stable bottom, that the power of the King might not be dangerous and fatal to the constitution: but never had it in their thoughts to overturn the Government, or introduce disorder and licence; and of this sort were most, or rather all the Presbyterians.

During the progress of the war, persons of quite different complexions prevailed. Men of levelling principles grew bold and numerous—the sectaries got into the army, and, gathering strength, entirely dispossessed the Parliament of their authority, brought the King to the scaffold, and, together with Episcopacy, overturned all government in the Church, being as great enemies to Presbytery as to the Hierarchy. Notwithstanding this, by a very unaccountable turn of thought, the different persons who began, carried on, and concluded that war, were considered as one body, moved by the same spirit, and acting on the same principles; and *the extravagancies of any one sect were imputed to all the*

rest, though in their views, principles, and management, they were as distinct from one another as from those who assumed to themselves the name of *Royalists*.

Such was the state of things, and such the temper of men, at the Restoration; when the Bishops and Clergy, who had been fretted and irritated, did not recover their temper and charity with their preferments, but remained too much under the power of wrath, revenge, and hatred, to any who, during the former troubles, had opposed them. The Presbyterians, who were the most powerful party of the Dissenters, were principally aimed at, and calumny became one of the engines of persecution, which was indefatigably wrought upon; though we shall do them the justice to own, that many of them might really have persuaded themselves of the truth of those black representations which they laboured to infuse into others. For, as we have mentioned, they had accustomed their minds to think the same way of all who could not comply with the Establishment. So that all the distractions of the late times, and the monstrous opinions of sects which then sprung up or grew to a height, were charged on the Presbyterians. Their doctrines and principles were declared to be of the same stamp and tendency with their alleged practice; they were wrested and perverted; the most foreign inferences were drawn from them, and the most false imputations made; and whatever an ignorant or angry disputer pleased to fancy of them, and afterwards confidently affirm, was believed to be their genuine doctrine by the unthinking multitude.

And as the same fierceness, heat, and uncharitableness, have continued to embitter and enrage many even till our times, the same methods of falsehood and calumny are still followed, and the present Church of Scotland used in the same manner with our fathers,—loaded with all the former reproaches, and blackened by each of those false and absurd imputations. So that our doctrines and principles are extremely mistaken, both by those who differ from us in our own country, and by the members of our neighbouring Church, who give frequently representations of them very different from what we are conscious they really are. So that, were a stranger to judge of our constitution and doc-

trine from the notions of them spread through the writings of that side, he must form a very false and injurious idea of both ; nor could we blame him for contemning and abhorring such a party as it is given out we are.

Were our principles only blackened with the most malicious slanders by such as openly favour Popery, and show an inclination to make too great advances to Rome,—or by men of haughty and passionate minds, who are impatient of the least contradiction, and have accustomed themselves to put the harshest construction on things, and treat every body that is so presumptuous as to differ from them with rudeness and ill language,—we should have rather pitied them than retaliated injuries, and endeavoured to bear it with patience, and an easiness of mind ; knowing that truth and charity must be always exposed to such usage from those of their adversaries in whom heat and darkness are the governing powers, and that a wise man will ever lay his account to meet with it, while there are so many who “whet their tongues like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words, that they may shoot in secret at the perfect.”

We should have, also, with as much indifference and calmness neglected the scurrilous abusive invectives which writers of a meaner rank abound with, or the railing of common pamphleteers, who write to vent their gall and ill-nature, or to gratify the bigotry and rancour of others,—since these are not to be reasoned with, and what they say will seldom make a disadvantageous impression upon any that are tolerably endowed with humanity and understanding.

But what affects us more sensibly, and seems to be in a peculiar degree the misfortune of our Church, is, that many of better sense and temper have taken up with the same false notions of it, and act according to the prejudices which have been instilled into them ; and it were easy to instance several late writers of our neighbouring Church, distinguished for their learning and moderation, and beyond the least suspicion of favouring Popery or tyranny, who yet seem to have entertained very mistaken ideas of our doctrine and government,—to have looked at them in a wrong light,—and taken up too much of the unfair colours under which enemies represent them.

All these make us regard our Confession of Faith as of more than usual importance with respect to *this first end*, which moved Churches to compose and publish Creeds,—the clearing their principles from calumnies and mistakes. As our fathers therefore did at the Reformation, we also beg now so evident and easy a piece of justice, that the world would form their sentiments of our doctrine and government upon that plain and open account given of them by ourselves, in the Confession of Faith embraced by the Church of Scotland, the Directory, Books of Discipline, and others of public authority amongst us,—since those principles alone can with any reason be imputed to us which the Church has owned, and it were the highest injustice to attribute any opinions to persons who disclaim them, and without any better proof that they are theirs, than the word of an adversary, who may have ignorantly taken up with a false and imperfect notion of them himself, or have been influenced by his envious and angry passions to give them the most odious turn, and represent them to their disadvantage.

And it is equally unreasonable to charge an error, or an extravagancy, which any particular member of a society may fall into, upon the whole body, while perhaps there is not one other that composes it of the same sentiments: and yet how common a method is this, whereby warm and forward men exert their party zeal, in defiance of truth and charity? How often has it been thought sufficient to justify the charge of fanaticism upon the Presbyterians, if an unwary expression or two, or perhaps an enthusiastical notion, could be culled out of one of the meanest writers of that denomination, though utterly disowned by the rest; and to blacken the whole body with all that abusive language and scandalous treatment that they can afford any colouring to, from the behaviour of writings of any who may pretend, and that falsely, to be of her communion?

Whereas the true account of any party can only be had from their own writings, and, above all, from the public declarations of their faith, and opinions agreed upon by joint consent of the whole body. And we flatter ourselves, that we have a more favourable plea than some others, to appeal from the slanderous or mistaken judgments that are fre-

quently made of us, to those authentic vouchers of our real principles,—because the members of our Church have hitherto been unacquainted with the method practised elsewhere, of subscribing articles, the primitive and obvious sense of which is contrary to the inward thoughts of the subscriber. Nor have they learned the art of distinguishing away the design and significancy of such tests ~~the~~ doctrine, and subtilizing the most solemn declarations into so thin and airy a form, that they can subsist without any reality, and be complied with, while principles of an entirely different complexion may be both believed and propagated. For, so far as we know, there is not one churchman in Scotland (and we are pretty sure that none will venture to own the contrary) who does not mean, by subscribing her Confession, to acknowledge his sincere belief of all the doctrines contained in it, as all the world must understand the words in the plainest and easiest sense. Upon which account, it is in a peculiar manner necessary, in order to form a just representation of our Church, to study her Confessions, and take measures of her from them.

Were this the method followed by some learned men of our neighbouring Church, or those amongst ourselves who separate from us, they would possibly be convinced with how little justice such heavy charges have been brought against us, our government treated with contempt, and our doctrines loaded with fancied absurdities, or vilified by ignominious epithets—and we doubt not, but, upon a fair and impartial hearing, though they may not approve of every part, they will yet be persuaded into a milder opinion of the whole, and more favourable sentiments of those of our persuasion.

We cannot mention all the particulars wherein this might be illustrated; we shall therefore only instance in two or three heads. They will see from the 23rd chapter of our Confession, concerning the civil magistrate, how false a bottom all the heavy imputations laid on us by angry adversaries lean upon,—as if we were enemies to order and government, and our principles were inconsistent with the peace of society, and the regard due to lawful superiors, so *that no man could favour us, and at the same time be a*

friend unto Caesar ;—since, from the account there given of our principles concerning civil government, it will appear, that no Church maintains doctrines which conduce more to its real dignity and stability, or gives less encouragement to the spirit of faction, and the clamours of seditious and ungovernable minds.

Our Church gives the noblest and most awful original to the magistrate's power,—the authority of God himself, who hath ordained them to be under him over the people, and armed them with the power of the sword,—and thereby begets a becoming fear and veneration for the rulers of a State. It represents this institution as designed to promote the most glorious ends, and the most useful and lovely purposes, the glory of God, and the public good. And under so amiable a view, our Church endears it to the affections, and recommend sit to the sincerest esteem and the cheerful obedience of its members ; and so secures the authority and majesty of the Prince upon the happiness of mankind, and the truest interest of those that obey ; which is a firmer, as well as a nobler foundation, than the doctrines of those who divest government of every sweet and amiable character, while they render it at the same time formidable and hateful, by clothing it with fears and horrors, and thereby indeed sap its foundations, and rob it of its glory and beauty ; and in what they call the supreme governor, they draw the image of a grim and frightful idol, that may be servilely bowed to and adored, but can never be esteemed or loved.

In a word, that chapter of our Confession will show that our Church allows every thing to a Monarch that is suitable to the excellency of that God by whom he reigns,—that is worthy of his own honour,—or that can enable him to accomplish the great and useful ends of his institution ; and that our principles are inconsistent with nothing but the domination of an arbitrary tyrant, and the inglorious passive obedience of a slave. And in one thing, I am afraid, we exceed our most furious accusers, in their zeal for the honour of Princes, since the fourth paragraph of that same chapter asserts, “ That ecclesiastical persons are not exempted from their jurisdiction.”

If we pass from the government of the State to that of

the Church, a very odious idea is given of us, as if, by being opposers of the Hierarchy, we overturned the sacred privileges of the Gospel ministry, or cut the sinews of ecclesiastical authority; and, because our constitution was not framed upon the same model with that of our neighbouring Church, we are pronounced a factious and licentious sect, enemies to order, promoters of confusion and an unrestrained liberty, and zealous for levelling principles in the Church and the State.

These, together with the other calumnies whereby we are blackened on this occasion, will appear in many respects false and injurious, and without any colouring afforded them by our real principles; since, from a consideration of the 25th, 30th, and 31st chapters of our Confession, with the Directory, it will be evident that, how little soever our opinions soothe and flatter the pride and vanity of earthly minds,—though they be not calculated for the aspiring schemes of ambition,—and must lay their account to be vilified and condemned by those who adore worldly greatness, and thirst after a power over the consciences of mankind, or grasp at a dominion above their brethren, such as the lords of the Gentiles exercise, and in all other respects they promise as little of the pomp and authority of earthly rulers; yet our Church, far from patronising confusion and disorder, maintains it as a fixed principle, “That the Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his Church, hath therein appointed a government, in the hand of church-officers, distinct from the civil magistrate;”—and attributes to these church-officers all the power that is necessary for the sacred ends of their appointment, or need be wished for by such as have no secret design of being *lords over God's heritage*, but can content themselves with being *helpers of their joy*,—such a power as is sufficient to keep the ministry pure and uncorrupted, by admitting none into that number who appear unworthy of so holy a character, and turning out any who may have *unawares crept in*, and become, by their ignorance, laziness, or dissolute lives, a scandal to their office, and of no use to the purposes of Christianity.

Nor does our Church in any respect enervate the vigour of *discipline*, or the force of censures, against profane and

vicious members, who usurp the Christian name, which they make themselves unworthy of. Such she allows her spiritual rulers to exclude from the society of visible Christians, or to admonish and rebuke with all authority. And however sensible we are of numerous defects, and shall easily acknowledge that in many instances we stand in need of further reformation,—yet we believe we may with some measure of confidence be allowed to glory in it, that there is no Church, which, in the exercise of discipline, comes nearer to the primitive model, and the example of those better times, when all the parts of discipline were levelled at the reclaiming of offenders, the discouraging of vice, and the maintaining the purity of the Christian society,—when no censure, and much less the last and most solemn act of ecclesiastical power, was prostituted to mean and unworthy purposes, and thereby exposed to a general contempt,—when the strength and force of discipline consisted in its influence upon the reason and consciences of mankind, and excommunication itself had only a spiritual efficacy, and was dreaded by Christians as the greatest punishment, from the terrors with which it filled guilty minds, and the power it gained in the hearts and breasts of sinners, and stood in no need of temporal penalties to enforce it, nor was attended by fines and imprisonments—arguments entirely foreign to the spiritual genius of that ecclesiastical government and discipline which was embraced by the purest ages, and maintained by none now in a greater degree than by the Church of Scotland.

An impartial inquiry into our Confession may have the same good effects with regard to the more refined and abstracted controversies of religion. It is known to all who have any acquaintance with divinity, with what undue heat and uncharitableness the disputes betwixt the Calvinists and Arminians have been managed, and what odious representations have been given of the opinions of different parties. The Church of Scotland, which has ever zealously espoused the doctrines of the great Calvin, or rather of the inspired apostle Paul, has on that account received her large share of ill usage. The harshest notions have been given of all those who came under the common denomination of *Calvinists*; and that not only by passionate little writers, but by men of

distinguished reputation, and acknowledged temper and abilities.

It is usual enough, because of our doctrines concerning faith, justification, and grace, to exclaim against us as persons who weaken the authority of the Divine law, and deny the necessity of good works,—who encourage our members to a lazy reliance upon the righteousness of another, and tempt them to the neglect of holiness in their own life. They say that our principles are so many pillows for slothful souls to rest upon, and opiates to lull them asleep in sin and security : and thus we are exposed as an hateful and abominable sect, that have little regard to morality and holiness.

Now would such persons have recourse to our Confession, they would soon be convinced how great an injury is done to us ; since, though we own it as our glory, that we entertain exalted thoughts of the grace of the Gospel, and abhor every notion that encroaches upon its sovereignty, or lessens its freedom,—that we maintain justification by faith, and not by works,—and would not willingly rob God of any part of the glory and honour of our salvation, by ascribing a share of it to ourselves, and attributing to our unworthy performances what is wholly owing to the obedience and satisfaction of our Saviour ; yet no Church, in more express terms, affirms the perpetual obligation of the Moral Law, which is no way dissolved by the Gospel,—the absolute necessity of holiness in order to salvation,—the vanity of that faith which is not accompanied with all the other graces of the Christian life, and with good works, which are its genuine fruits and evidences, when true and lively,—or is more sensible of the fatal mistake of such who fancy that Christian liberty gives the least encouragement to the indulgence of any lust. All which is evident from the whole strain of our Confession.

It will appear as hard and unjust treatment, when we are charged with representing the blessed God as a severe and cruel being, the object only of fears and terrors, because of the doctrine we maintain concerning reprobation ;—or as a despotic and arbitrary monarch, that is not governed by the *measures* of wisdom and goodness, but punishes sin, of which

we make himself the author, because of our opinions about the absoluteness of his decrees,—the freedom of his electing love,—and the sovereignty of his grace and providence ; since, how little soever they may approve of our sentiments in these matters, they will perceive, that, in as plain and positive terms, we own the infinite purity of the Divine nature, and the justice of His procedure,—remove as far from Him the smallest possibility of evil, and attribute the origin of sin wholly to the creature,—and endeavour to give as lovely and amiable notions of the Father of mercies, and to celebrate with as loud and fervent praises his unbounded compassions, and incomprehensible goodness and patience, as our adversaries themselves do.

We know it may be alleged, that, how positively soever we disclaim all these monstrous errors, yet they are the necessary consequences of the other doctrines which we avowedly profess ; so that were the one certain, the other would naturally be established. But were it true, that such blasphemies could be inferred from our doctrine of absolute decrees, or any other of the opinions of Calvin, yet it would be contrary to the plainest rules of justice and charity, to ascribe those absurd and impious notions to us ; since we, in the loudest manner, disavow them, and profess that we are not able to discern that our doctrines have the smallest tendency towards those unworthy thoughts of the infinitely holy and merciful God, which we abhor and detest as much as they themselves can do, but believe all our principles consistent with these amiable excellencies of the Divine nature.

They may, according to their own way of thinking, accuse us of weakness and ignorance, and fancy that our eyes are dim and short-sighted, when we can discern none of those absurd consequences which appear so clearly to them ; but as long as we remain in this condition—deny the supposed consequences, and give no reason to suspect the sincerity of our professions—it is evidently injurious still to load us with them, as if they were our real sentiments ; which is indeed to charge upon people, not what they truly think and perceive, but what we fancy they should see and judge, concerning the nature and consequences of their faith.

We know it is too common for writers on every side to

blacken their adversaries ; and after they have painted, in the ugliest and most hateful form, all the blasphemies and absurdities which they fancy to be the necessary consequences of their opinions, to charge the whole upon such as differ from them, though as zealous as themselves against those false and impious doctrines. Nor shall we deny but there are authors of every side who make a merit of their art and dexterity in this way of writing ;—who seem to think every spot wherewith they bespatter their adversaries an ornament and beauty of their performance, and that the blacker they make him, they promote more effectually the interests of their own party. But a prevailing custom does not render injustice and ill-nature less culpable ; nor does their rarity tarnish the loveliness of moderation and charity, or excuse a neglect of them by any author.

The treating of an adversary with fierceness, anger, or disdain ; the representing his opinions in the worst light ; and especially the inveighing against the blasphemies or absurdities which we think flow from his schemes, as if they were really a part of them, and adopted by him, with all the other angry arts of controversy of this kind ; instead of doing any good, tend equally to the disgrace of the writer, and the disadvantage of his cause. They argue a proud and imperious spirit, that is impatient of contradiction, and expects an absolute submission from the rest of the world to its notions and dictates. They flow generally from a narrowness and contradiction of thought, that can allow no virtuous quality, nor make any favourable concession to an adversary ; and they almost always show, that the writer is of a small extent of learning and reading, and hath confined his inquiries to the authors of his own side, and bounded his understanding by their party limits, or darkened it by their errors and prejudices, and so is incapable of great and noble advances in knowledge.

Such disputers demonstrate, that the prevailing passions in their breasts are wrath, and hatred, and vanity, which have extinguished charity, and justice, and humility. And these always make the performance of no effect with an adversary, and can never reclaim him from an error ; because they embitter his spirit, and awaken his resentment ; make him con-

sider the author as his violent enemy ; and enervate the force even of good reasonings, by persuading him, that they are as insignificant as he knows the hideous representations given of his own principles and party, by the same writer, are false and calumnious. And though they may inflame the zeal of those who are blindly devoted to them, and prepossessed by the same prejudices, yet if ever such become better acquainted with those that differ from them, they will be apter to desert altogether their former party, and fancy the whole of their doctrines are ill-founded, as they see the aspersions groundless which were thrown upon adversaries by their own angry guides.

Were the devil a writer of controversies, such would be his methods. Satire would undoubtedly be his chief talent ; and uncharitable heats, and calumnious representations, and heavy charges upon the contrary side, would be engines suitable enough to his hellish temper and designs. But it is a strange inconsistency in one that pretends to argue in defence of any part of Christianity,—so mild, and gentle, and charitable an institution—a religion, the distinguishing beauties whereof are love, and benevolence, and forbearance,—to do it by artifices which owe their being to impatience, anger, pride, and wrath, as if these could ever be useful to anything which belongs to the meek and lowly Jesus. Modesty, candour, and charity, are the chief qualities of any writer ; but they seem to be essential to a Christian one.

Some may possibly think, that such a fair and impartial inquiry into our real principles will be too laborious ; and they may entertain so contemptible thoughts of us and them, as to imagine a more perfect knowledge not worth the necessary expense of thought and time, however small that be. But we hope we may be allowed to beg this favour of such, that if they so far despise us, they would forbear to calumniate us ; and till they can give themselves the leisure to know what we are, that they would employ their tongues and pens, as well as thoughts, upon another subject ; lest they may be numbered amongst those spoken of, who, “as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not, and shall utterly perish in their own corruption.”

Before we leave this argument, as a proof how easily men may mistake the principles of their adversaries in abstruse metaphysical speculations, we shall crave leave to mention a very palpable misrepresentation of Scotch affairs, in so plain a matter of fact, that an error about it is surprising, especially when committed by an author famed for his moderation and ingenuity, namely, Sir Richard Steele; who, in his dedication to the Pope of *An Account of the State of the Romish Religion*, published by him, has these words: "In Scotland, let a man depart an inch from the Confession of Faith, and rule of worship, established by the Assembly there; and he will quickly find, that, as cold a country as it is, it will be too hot for him to live in." One would be apt to conclude from these words, that we were animated by the persecuting spirit of Popery, and pursued the same methods of convincing heretics; and that people were frequently punished in Scotland upon account of nonconformity, or a difference in opinion from the Established Church; whereas it is a truth as clear as the sun, that there is no such thing as persecution in our Church,—that persons enjoy as undisturbed a freedom of thought in our country as any where else,—and upon a change of their sentiments, never feel such an alteration in the climate, as should force them to live elsewhere,—nor can one instance be given where ever any man was fined, imprisoned, or exposed to any hardship, because of his departing from our Confession.

And it will afterwards appear, that what the same author adds, that with us "infants are baptized, not only into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but into the pure doctrine professed and settled by the Church of Scotland," argues an equal unacquaintedness with our Constitution, and an easy credulity in entertaining such notions.

Thus we have in some measure illustrated the first purpose for which the churches composed and published their Confessions of Faith.

II. The second end they proposed by their Confessions was, that, by publishing so solemn and authentic declarations of their faith to the whole world, it might appear with what cheerfulness and zeal they owned those doctrines,—that a

religion hated and contemned by the greatest part of mankind, was the object of their highest esteem and veneration, —and that they were so far from being ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, that they gloried in it as their dearest privilege, and most valuable possession. By such a public profession also of these heavenly truths, they intended solemnly to declare their gratitude and thankfulness to Almighty God, who had brought them to the knowledge of them. Agreeably hereto, the Bohemians, and the Duke of Wirtemberg, express themselves in the prefaces to the Confessions of their churches.

When God crowns a people with distinguishing blessings, and manifests the greatness of His excellencies in their behalf, they should not conceal them from the world, or bury them in a disregarded silence, but take all opportunities of spreading abroad the fame of His mighty acts, and declaring their gratitude unto Him. To this the Psalmist persuades the oppressed who should be delivered by God, "Sing praises to the Lord, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings. Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people." And such, it is foretold, will be the grateful temper of Israel, when God shall convert him to the truth, "And in that day shall ye say, Praise the Lord, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted." Nor is there a less obligation upon a public society, than on a private person, to imitate the Psalmist's example, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." Now, in no instance does the Father of mercies manifest himself to a people under that character in a more illustrious manner, than when He discovers to them the truths of Religion, pure and uncorrupted, and causes the light of the Gospel, in all its glory, to shine in upon them. This is the noblest privilege, and most valuable gift of Providence, which should therefore be acknowledged with the loudest songs of praise; and that Church must be in the highest degree unworthy of the Divine favours, and ungrateful to the Author of them, that is ashamed to own the goodness of God, or that neglects any opportunity of declaring to all about them, the incomparable

value they have for those statutes and testimonies which He hath revealed to them.

Our Church, therefore, upon all occasions gloried in the doctrines contained in her Confessions, and cheerfully fell in with this end which moved the churches to compose and publish such systems of doctrine. Every time her Confessions are published, she proclaims her adherence to the Divine truths contained in them,—she boasts of them as her greatest honour,—and acknowledges her obligations to the infinite goodness of our merciful God, who did not leave us groaning under the tyranny of Antichrist, and wandering amidst the thick clouds of error and superstition, which had entirely overspread that apostate church, and overshadowed the purity and beauty of Christianity with ignorance and idolatry; but distinguished us from the nations round about us, by a clear discovery of the “doctrine according to godliness,” and giving us open access to our Bibles, wherein we may read the uncorrupted “words of eternal life.”

Our Church owns herself under peculiar ties to the loudest and most fervent praises of her glorious Deliverer. We were early blessed with the Christian religion; our country, in other respects inferior to some of our neighbours, was enlightened in the first ages by the Gospel; and as we received it in its primitive purity, we enjoyed it in its native light and glory, longer than most other nations, which sooner yielded to the growing power of the Roman Pontiff, and, with a mean submission to that usurped domination over the consciences of men, embraced all the absurd opinions, and superstitious heathenish rites, whereby the lustre of Christianity was tarnished, and its original excellency destroyed. The remains of our ancient history make it highly probable, if not certain, that our ecclesiastical government was a long time enlivened by the spirit of liberty, and had small acquaintance with that Hierarchy which had swelled to an excessive bulk, and become an intolerable burden upon others. Our Culdees seem to have breathed that noble freedom, the expiring groans of which were scarce remembered in other places; our worship also, and doctrine, as well as government, enjoyed their primitive simplicity, and did not, without struggling, put on the *false ornaments* of worldly pomp, and external magnificence.

And though we at length degenerated, and were carried along with the whole world that *wondered after the beast*, yet we were enlightened with the early dawn of the Gospel. The blessings of the Reformation were bestowed upon us with distinguishing advantages, and that happy change made further advances than it did amongst others : nor did it stop, till, with the tyranny of Rome, it abolished also all the innovations in worship and government, which had gradually crept into the Church, and obscured the beauty of religion, till at length they had grown so thick and numerous, as to occasion that dark night of Antichristian ignorance and idolatry.

Every thing with us that could not plead the earliest antiquity and apostolical times, was at once thrown aside, and our whole Constitution was built alone upon the model of the Scriptures, which we looked upon as the only measure of the Reformation. Nor did we pretend, according to our fancy, to retain some picked ceremonies, and observe some favourite holidays, while we rejected others which rested on the same foundation, and had the like authority of Councils; and power of once prevailing custom, to plead in their behalf.

That very same doctrine which the Reformation brought into our Church, was afterwards preserved entire, and is now published in our Confession of Faith. The same spirit of liberty animates the whole of our Constitution, which inspired our first efforts against Rome. We can never, therefore, enough express our gratitude to that over-ruling Providence, which hath preserved those blessings to us by a train of wonders, and maintained a Church that had no worldly support, nor was calculated for temporal designs, amidst a throng of dangers on every side : so that neither the cunning of politics, nor the violence of the severest persecution, nor the terrors of laws that became a reproach to humanity, were effectual to destroy it ; but it hath surmounted the most shocking difficulties, and outbraved the most furious assaults of rage and cruelty. The history of our Church justifies the choice she has made of the "*bush burning, and never consumed*," as an emblem of her past state, and her future hopes. We still own our adherence to this Constitution, which has been so violently attacked, and

so gloriously maintained and preserved. And now, when in the haven of tranquillity, we look back with pleasure and thankfulness upon the darkness and horrors of the *land of Egypt*, from the bondage whereof the Reformation brought us up; and, calling to mind the storms and tempests which were big with threatened ruin, and tossed this Church about upon the boisterous ocean of tyranny and persecution, we offer up our sacrifices of thanksgiving: and being in a like state, account ourselves under the same obligations with those who, after being exposed to the fury of the winds, and the rage of the billows, which made them despair of safety, were brought to their desired haven, to "praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men;" to "exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders."

It is a duty which, upon all occasions, Christians owe to the truths of the Gospel, to own them with confidence, and never to be ashamed to profess before men their esteem of them; but there are some seasons which afford peculiar motives to the most open declarations of this, and call upon them to publish their faith to the world, and glory in it as their highest dignity. If, for example, any of the doctrines of our holy religion should be exposed to contempt and ignominy—run down by clamour, and loaded with reproaches, if the institutions of Christ should be looked down upon with disdain by the rich and great, and represented as rude and insignificant by the wise and learned,—if they were deserted by those who once maintained them, and the persons and churches once famed for their zeal, should suffer their purity to be gradually stained, and make compliances with the manners and schemes of the world; it were mean and inglorious in such a case for a Church that has preserved her integrity, to be ashamed of her doctrine, and retire into a corner. Then God expects that she should openly acknowledge contemned truth, and the more it is misrepresented and vilified by others, that she should the more warmly embrace it, and the more loudly espouse its interests.

When therefore numberless heresies have crept into the Church, and the enchantments of error have bewitched the

minds of men, so that, with the greatest part, ignorance and falsehood triumph over the interests of truth, and overcloud the purity of Gospel light,—and when some of the most important doctrines of Christianity, which were reputed of the highest value by our fathers at the Reformation, and embraced with the warmest affections, are not only disbelieved, but reproached, and such as profess them branded with the most odious characters, and condemned as men of narrow souls and shallow capacities, if not hated and abominated as blasphemous and impious—when this is the unworthy state of the doctrines, particularly of electing love, and victorious grace, of the independency of God's decrees, and His supreme irresistible dominion over His creatures, with others of the same kind—the Church of Scotland is not ashamed of her Confession, where these principles are asserted in their full extent and purity. She glories in them as her highest honour, and accounts it an incomparable privilege that all her members retain the faith of the Reformation; especially that doctrine which is calculated for exalting the sovereignty of Divine grace, and the attributing every step in the salvation and happiness of sinners to God, and no part of it to apostate man. She undervalues the calumnies and the scorn of insulting adversaries, and hopes never to be moved from her principles by slander and ignominy. Clamour and noise, contempt and reproach, in such a cause, she *“takes upon her shoulders, and binds upon her head as a crown of glory.”*

And the greater hazard that the purity of Divine truth may be in of losing a part of its lustre and beauty in some Protestant Churches, where it might have been hoped these would have shone with a lasting brightness, free from interposing clouds—our Church reckons it the more distinguishing honour which she is dignified with, in being enabled steadily to maintain her old principles, and being free from the contagion of error, which proves so universally infectious, and values herself the higher for this inestimable advantage.

We in the same manner celebrate the goodness of God, which carried our Reformation to such a high pitch of perfection, with respect to our Government and Worship, and delivered them from all that vain pomp which darkened the glory of the Gospel service, and the whole of those super-

stitious or insignificant inventions of an imaginary decency and order, which sullied the divine beauty and lustre of that noble simplicity that distinguished the devotions of the apostolical times. And our Church glories in the primitive plainness of her worship, more than in all the foreign ornaments borrowed from this world, though these appear indeed incomparably more charming to earthly minds.

We are sensible that it is a necessary consequence of the nature of our Reformation in these particulars, that there is nothing left in our worship which is proper to captivate the senses of mankind, or amuse their imaginations. We have no magnificence and splendour of devotion to dazzle the eye, nor harmony of instrumental music to enliven our worship, and soothe the ears of the assembly. Pomp, and show, and ceremony, are entirely strangers in our churches; and we have little in common with that apostate Church, whose yoke we threw off at the Reformation, or with the exterior greatness and magnificence of the Jewish temple and its service.

For which reason, we know we must lay our account to be despised by the men of this world, who value nothing that is stripped of the allurements of sense, and fancy that a rich and gaudy dress contributes to the majesty, and raises the excellency, of religious service,—who seek for the same dazzling pomp and splendid appearances to recommend their worship, which they are so fond of in their equipage and tables,—and think that a veneration and respect to the service of the Church is to be raised by the same methods that procure an esteem and fondness for a Court. We have nothing to tempt persons of such inclinations;—we know they will entertain the meanest thoughts, and most disdainful notions, of a worship too plain and homely for them, and fit only for the rude and unmannerly multitude, who have not a delicate enough taste of what is truly great and noble.

But how much soever upon this account we may be despised by the great and the learned, the Church of Scotland, we hope, will always publicly own the simplicity and plainness of her worship as her peculiar glory; and believe, that *these*, to a spiritual eye, are beautified with a lustre which

external objects are incapable of, and of too elevated a nature for the senses to look at. She is not ashamed to acknowledge her sentiments—that the devotions of Christians stand in no need of the outward helps afforded to the Jews,—and that the triumphs of all-conquering love, the mighty acts of a Redeemer, all the powers and glories of an immortal life, that are represented to our wonder and meditation under the Gospel, are far nobler springs of devotion, and fitter to animate with a cheerful zeal, and inspire the most fervent affections, than the meaner helps afforded under the law,—the costliness of pontifical garments,—the glory of a magnificent temple,—the ceremony of worship,—and the power of music.

Our Church believes it to be one design of the better Reformation of things, to raise the Christian worshippers above the airy grandeur of sense; and instead of a laborious service, to introduce a worship worthy of the Father of spirits, that should be truly great and manly, the beauty and the power of which should be spirit and life, and which, instead of a servile imitation of the temple, should be all purified reason and religion, and make the nearest approaches to the devotion of the heavenly state, where *“there is no temple.”* And how despicable soever this may appear to earthly minds, and distasteful to the senses, that are pleased with show and appearance, we are not afraid to own, that we believe that an imitation of our blessed Redeemer and his Apostles, in the plainness and spirituality of their devotions, and an endeavour to copy after the example of these truly primitive times, will ever bear us up to all the just decency and order of the Gospel Church; and that, in conformity to this the naked simplicity of our worship is beautified with a superior lustre, and shines with a brightness that is more worthy of it, than when dressed in the gayest colours, and busked up with the richest and most artful ornaments of human fancy and contrivance.

Were we in this nation possessed by a just value for these incomparable advantages of our Reformation, and had we a due esteem for its purity, and the uncommon advances it has made in our Church, with what pleasure would we celebrate these heavenly blessings with the loudest songs! Animated

by a noble pride, we would value ourselves beyond others, and boast that we were raised to a more elevated and happy situation than those kingdoms that can speak of the glory of victories, and the pomp of triumphs, and the splendour of greatness. Without any repinings of envy, we would look back upon the fertility of soil, the affluence of pleasures, which other countries exceed us in,—upon their trade, and luxury, and riches, when flowing in with the highest tide of plenty. How incomparably would we think those temporal advantages overbalanced by the blessings of our Reformation,—by His word which He shewed unto us, and the statutes and judgments that with so bright a light He hath discovered ! And thus, while “*the wise gloried in their wisdom, the mighty in their might, or the rich in their riches,*” in this would we glory with a nobler triumph, that the Lord hath given us in such a manner “*to know and understand Him.*”

Before we leave this subject, we shall observe one thing which possibly might influence our Reformation, and be in some measure the reason of its making a happier progress with us than it did with others.

Amongst the several Protestant Churches that departed from Rome, there was this remarkable difference,—that with some the alteration of religion happened under the protection, and by the assistance, of the civil government. Such as were in authority fell in with the design, and kings and princes were the chief men who promoted it, and put themselves at the head of the Reformation ; so that a change was made in the established religion without any confusion or irregularity ; and this was in particular the so much boasted of privilege of the Church of England.

In other places, the Prince stuck close to the old way,—adhered to the idolatry and tyranny of Popery,—and employed his power and authority in crushing the Reformation, and persecuting those who embraced it ; which brought the professors of the true religion under a necessity to maintain by arms the freedom of their consciences, and the liberties of their country, against the fury of their arbitrary sovereigns ; whereby the Constitution was exposed to mighty convulsions and disorders ; and the light of the Gospel, which then began to shine in its brightness, seemed to be obscured by the

blood and confusion which accompanied its rise and progress: yet, through the admirable management of Divine Providence, the uncommon purity of our Reformation seems to be in some measure owing to these disadvantageous circumstances of it.

A mighty zeal animated our fathers, who had been enlightened by the Gospel, and were making their way out of Babylon. Their breasts were inflamed with an ardent love to truth, and their affections enlivened by a warm, disinterested regard to its interests. They were struck with amazement at the terrible bondage which had for so many ages enslaved the world, and the thick darkness of superstition and ignorance in which the Church was overwhelmed. The fatal consequences and monstrous absurdities hereof awakened their resentment against Antichrist,—filled them with horror at his abominations,—and put life into their endeavours. They resolved immediately to believe nothing but what the Scriptures taught, and to make those Divine Oracles the measure of their worship and government, as well as the standard of their doctrine.

The generous spirit of liberty breathed with an universal vigour, and the noble soul of the Reformation invigorated every part; so that no distinction was made of days and ceremonies, which were alike destitute of Scripture support. They did not apply themselves to pick out from amongst the rest the fairest and least hazardous fruits that were nourished by human fancy and art—nor did they stand to make a composition with the degeneracy of religion: but the spirit and the genius of the Reformation, like a mighty torrent, bore all down before it that had not the apostolical times to keep it up; and the people did not then “*consult with flesh and blood*,” or make worldly politics or earthly views distinguish betwixt things which were alike blameable and unwarrantable; and therefore we find, where ever this heroic zeal animated our fathers, and the spirit of the Reformation was not hemmed in by some outward restraints, that it universally spread its influence through every branch of worship. Thus, in Holland, Switzerland, France, several parts of Germany, and in our own country, where the Reformation begun amongst the people,—though discouraged by the civil magistrate,—the

above-named advances in the purity and simplicity of worship and government were made.

Whereas, though it was in some respects the happiness of our neighbouring Church, that matters were carried on with more regularity, and the interests of religion grew up under the shadow of lawful authority; yet this very thing seems to have deprived the spirit of the Reformation of its unlimited freedom, and restrained its efficacy. Nor could that heroic zeal which glowed in the breasts of our fathers exert itself so universally, and with such diffusive influence; because, as the Reformation was there assisted by secular powers, so it was modelled according to their taste and humour. Flesh and blood bore a share in the counsels which managed it, and an intermixture of worldly politics and interests stopped its progress, and overshadowed its purity and beauty by some remains of the old superstitions.

Henry VIII.—all whose zeal against Rome took its rise from the impetuosity of his own passions, and terminated wholly in himself—had little thought of making any changes, but such as might be subservient to his lust and ambition; and that great Princess, who, it must be owned, was moved by greater views, was yet in every thing a lover of pomp and magnificence; and therefore the worship which was reformed by her, was necessitated to retain a great part of its show and ceremony, which she was so fond of, and which in all places are too agreeable to the taste of the rich and great, whose depraved appetites nauseate the simplicity of Divine things. In the settling of Ecclesiastical affairs, the genius of the Court intermixed itself with, and in some instances prevailed over, that of the Gospel; and both the government and worship were too much adapted to the model of the civil constitution, and to the humour of secular greatness, and framed so as to become subservient to the views and designs of the prince; whereby the spirit of the Reformation was extremely enervated, and could not exert itself with so much life and success, as it did in those places where there was not so much room for the influence of such principles,—the people having reformed of themselves, without the sovereign. And what indeed the native tendency of the Reformation *every where* was, had it been left to its own genius, seems

to appear from the conduct and doctrine of many of the first Reformers of the Church of England, whose principles were of the same nature with ours, and plainly lead the same way.

As all Courts are in love with magnificence, and dote with fondness on the rich and splendid appearances of an external majesty and elevation,—and as the maxims of princes are almost everywhere the same,—so we find the Reformation was in some measure managed in a suitableness thereto, in the several countries where it was carried on by the civil government, and modelled by the interposition of the Prince. Thus, in Sweden, Denmark, as well as in England, their Ecclesiastical government, and religious devotions, breathe more of the air of the Court, and are more adjusted to the maxims of secular state and grandeur.

III. A third purpose which the Christian Churches have all along proposed to themselves in publishing their Confessions was, that they might contribute to the mutual comfort and edification of one another,—maintain a good correspondence,—and increase brotherly love, by showing how far, and in how momentous things, they agreed together.

A soul inflamed with the love of God, and animated by a fervent zeal for religion, cannot but feel a sensible pleasure when its interests flourish in the world, and truth and purity make advances, or maintain themselves, amidst the powerful and vigilant enemies by which the Church is always surrounded, and the dangerous snares and difficulties it has to grapple with. For, as all the faithful subjects of the Messiah's kingdom obey Him with the most unconstrained willingness, and love Him with the warmest affection, the glory of His empire becomes the dearest object of their wishes; and the brighter it grows, and the more His throne is exalted, the greater joy flows into their panting hearts; and each of the victories which light and truth obtain over error and ignorance, is attended with louder acclamations, and carries along with it into their souls a more exquisite delight, than ever the greatest conquests of the bravest and happiest generals occasioned to the citizen that was most zealous for the glory of his country, and the honour of Rome.

And therefore those Churches which embrace the same doctrines of Christianity, do, by publishing authentic declarations of their faith, give mutual satisfaction to one another, and yield to the whole body that pleasure which a soul inspired with the highest esteem and affection for truth must receive from its propagation and advancement in the world. And as every sinner that is converted upon earth, gives life and vigour to the satisfaction of heaven itself, and is a source of delight to the angels; so the new discoveries which every saint on earth can make, of a Church or a person's maintaining the same faith with himself, especially when it may be abandoned and vilified by those about him, will enliven his spirits, and comfort his soul. But we hope, that our Confession will in a peculiar manner gain this end, since it belongs to a Church, all the members of which, as we have reason to believe, sincerely maintain the faith contained in it, without imposing upon themselves and the world, by artful distinctions and subtleties, or making use of the arguments of blood and persecution to preserve or propagate that faith.

And the only reason why men have not a due sense of the nobleness and excellence of this end of Confessions is, because so few are inspired with an affectionate regard for religion and truth, and make *Jerusalem their chiefest joy*. The degenerate professors of Christianity do universally prefer their own things to those of Christ; and so they are little affected, either with the rage and prevalence of His enemies, or the triumphs of His victorious grace and love in the world.

The several Churches of Christ scattered throughout different kingdoms, by whatever peculiarities they may be distinguished from one another, do yet compose but one society, and are all members of that one body whereof Christ Jesus is the Head. Whenever they merit that name, they are animated by the same spirit, governed by the same maxims, and invigorated by strength, and courage, and perseverance, derived from one source, and *drawn from the same wells of salvation*. The relation which they stand under to their common Lord and Saviour, joins together all the *subjects of this glorious kingdom by the strictest bonds of*

union, and lays them under inviolable obligations to every thing which can tend to promote it, and to the most intimate friendship, ardent love, and universal charity.

Hence all the Churches—how distant soever in place and condition, whether in a flourishing or persecuted state, and though differing, it may be, in complexion, and some less remarkable features—ought to maintain an uninterrupted communion, and keep up that fellowship with one another which they all enjoy *with the Father and the Son*. And it were to be wished that more, even of an external union and friendship,—a communication of counsels and occurrences,—could obtain amongst Christians; and that suitable methods could be fallen upon to beget a good correspondence, and keep up a familiarity amongst the several Churches, who are all *baptized into the same God and Saviour*.

Now one of those things by which the members of Christ's mystical body are to maintain mutual communion, is the sameness of their faith and doctrine, and an agreement in a belief of those important truths of religion which are taught in the Gospel. Hence the apostle, recommending unity amongst Christians, and showing wherein it consists, mentions faith as one considerable instance. "*One Lord*," says he, "*one faith, one baptism*:" and it is represented as the design of all Divine ordinances, "that they may be brought in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man." Now it will be easily perceived how well adapted Creeds are to promote this act of Christian communion.

The Church of Scotland, therefore, by her Confession, embraces with the sincerest love and friendship, and joins in the most extensive fellowship with all those through the world that receive the same common faith. She declares her inviolable affection and unity with all such as believe the important truths of the glorious Gospel, and entertain the hope of the great salvation, and the necessary means to attain it; though the nearer they approach to her in the belief of those truths that may be of an inferior nature, this communion becomes stricter and more intimate.

It has occasioned a sensible concern to all who value religion and goodness, and has been the frequent object of

their regret and sorrow, that there should be so many lamentable divisions amongst the Protestant Churches, who were united together in throwing off the yoke of Antichrist; and in their generous efforts against that spiritual tyranny,—who seemed all then to be animated by the same noble spirit, and to move towards the same end, but have since, to the reproach of our holy religion, and the scandal of adversaries, given way to a spirit of faction and discord,—crumbled into parties,—and formed distinct sects. Lutherans and Calvinists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians, have separated from one another, under different denominations—set up interfering interests—and pursued contrary measures.

How much soever it were to be wished, it can scarce indeed be ever expected—while we breathe the impure and cloudy air of these lower regions—that sincere Christians should agree in all their opinions about smaller matters, and their notions concerning the circumstantialia of religion; since “*we here know but in part,*” “*and see darkly, as through a glass.*” A perfect agreement in judgment, and absolute unity of faith, are reserved for that world of light and purity, where God himself being the sun, the invariable light of truth flows, without an interposing cloud, into all those purified souls that are perfectly fit to entertain it in its unmixed glory.

But it is a melancholy consideration, and altogether inexcusable, that when charity is the peculiar character of our religion, and when it is one of its plainest, as well as most important precepts, that, studying mutual forbearance, “*whereunto we have already attained, we should all walk by the same rule, and mind the same things;*” yet Protestants should be more alienated from one another in their affections, than they are divided in their sentiments; and that the several parties, upon numberless occasions, manifest the greatest bitterness and hatred against one another, and give a loose to all the impetuosity of passion, and resentment, and envy. They load one another with the blackest calumnies, and exert the greatest warmth and keenness of party zeal in a mutual opposition; and, even where matters arrived not to so great an extremity, universal experience is *too fruitful* an evidence, that a difference of sentiments in

religious matters, especially amongst separate Churches, is attended with a coldness of affection, and a faintness and languishing, if not a total extinction of love. As if a disagreement in opinion, or zeal for a truth of confessedly smaller importance, could excuse a contempt of the most momentous commands of our Saviour, and a trampling on those graces, the begetting of which in us is the design of His sufferings, and the scope of all His doctrines; and which will remain the glory and ornament of a heavenly religion, when victorious Charity will shine with an undiminished beauty and lustre, after the grave has drawn a shadow over Faith and Hope.

Now there are few things which will conduce more successfully to beget these noble virtues of Christianity,—revive moderation and forbearance amongst the Protestant Churches,—and maintain a friendly correspondence, than a right improvement, and an attentive consideration, of their several Confessions of Faith; because thereby it will be evident, that they agree, not only in the essential foundations of religion, but in all the principles of special moment; and that those which any of them differ about, are no wise comparable to the others, either for their number or importance. One should think, that an agreement in any principle of moment should be at least as apt to warm the affections of Christians, and inspire them with a mutual love, as a difference in another, perhaps disputable, opinion, and a pretended zeal for religion in maintaining it, are effectual to engender strife and animosity.

Would, therefore, the several parties of Protestants but seriously consider in what great things we all concur,—that we are the subjects of the same Almighty King, and equally profess our *hope of the common salvation*,—that we agree all in the belief of Jesus being the Messiah, of the glorious things that a Christian is raised to the expectation of, and the proper means to attain these blessings—the faith and obedience of the Gospel,—that we join in the principles of the Reformation, and profess a mutual abhorrence of the idolatry and abominations of the Antichristian Church; and thus “*have one hope, one faith, one baptism*,”—in a word, did we consider, that men of all these divisions may be alike *pilgrims and*

strangers in this world, animated by the prospect of the regions of light and day, when the clouds that now darken and perplex us will be entirely dissipated, and may all in sincerity make religion their principal study, and agree in their choice of God for their portion, and preferring the honour of Christ to their greatest joys; how would the meditation hereof stifle our angry passions, and cool our unnatural heats? Our being united in the love and service of our common Master, would reconcile the keenest disputants, and blunt the edge of controversy; we would be ashamed of our uncharitableness and impatience, and blush at the treatment we give to those that may be members of the same body whereof Christ is the Head. Our hearts would relent, and our bowels would be moved, when we reflected on the endearments of a heavenly friendship, which, notwithstanding of our present little differences, we may all be exalted to the eternal enjoyment of. And surely, could there be any shame in that happy place, no doubt we would be then confounded at the sight of many there, whom we treated as enemies upon earth, and pursued with bitter and incurable resentments or prejudices.

Did we thus improve the harmony of the Protestant Confessions, we would embrace one another with the warmest affections, and manage our debates with coolness and moderation; and we are sure controversies sweetened with temper and charity, would be much readier to gain converts, and bring us to an uniformity, than the way in which they are at present managed. An extensive charity, and a noble freedom of love, that are unconfined by the little distinctions of parties and schemes, would unite good men of all denominations, and make virtue and piety every where esteemed and loved; and that warmth and zeal which are so uselessly or hurtfully spent in our intestine feuds, would be employed in a vigorous opposition to our common enemies, and joint efforts against the prevailing interest of darkness and wickedness.

Upon this occasion it will not be improper also to observe, that by comparing together the doctrines of the Protestant Churches, it will appear, that as to those opinions in which we differ from our neighbours in England, about government *and* worship, we have on our side a better claim to the

suffrages of all those Churches beyond sea who with us threw off the Romish yoke; and that those distinguished by the name of *High Church*, who have stretched their schemes about the absolute necessity of Episcopal ordination, baptism, and communion, in such an extravagant manner, must, together with us, and their own Dissenters, un-church almost all the other Protestants but themselves. Which plain consequence will readily expose their narrow bigotry and vanity to contempt with all who have a value for the Protestant cause; and we hope that the ranking with heathens and publicans so many great and good men,—at once damning all the heroic martyrs of the Reformation,—may fill even themselves with horror, beget in them some remorse, and engage them to examine a little more coolly the nature and tendency of such wild and uncharitable principles.

As for us, we pity their impotent malice, and are content to run the common fate of Protestants. Their thunders and excommunications breed no disturbance in our consciences, since we know they are so contradictory to the spirit and genius of Christianity; and whatever impressions they may make here below upon blind and furious minds, we are in no fears of their imposing on our great Master, or becoming of reputation in the kingdom of love and charity.

Some other things might be observed, which will be as conveniently mentioned at the end.

PART II.

THAT END OF CONFESSIONS WHICH PARTICULARLY RESPECTS THE RULERS AND PASTORS OF THE CHURCH, WHEN CREEDS ARE ESTABLISHED AS A STANDARD OF ORTHODOXY, AND MUST BE SUBSCRIBED BY ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICE-BEARERS.

WE come now to consider the *second* general end for which Confessions of Faith were framed,—namely, to secure the purity of the Christian doctrine from the many contagious heresies which in all ages have infested the Church; to distinguish betwixt those who were infected by prevailing error, and such as persevered in the uncorrupted faith of the Gospel; and so to discover who in this respect should be admitted into the communion of saints, or might, without danger to religion and truth, be ordained to, or continued in, the sacred office of the ministry: for which purposes, subscriptions were required to certain articles, that were suited to the circumstances of the Church, and contradicted the principal errors which prevailed in different ages, and the danger whereof was most apprehended.

I. Creeds and Confessions have been thus used as a test of orthodoxy in all ages, and in all places. Everybody who is in the least acquainted with ecclesiastical affairs, knows the sentiments and practice of the ancient Church about this matter. Besides the shorter Creeds, which were universally received, upon any difference that arose amongst the *Fathers*, Councils were summoned, and decisions were made,

to which all were obliged to yield their assent who had a mind to continue in communion with the Church. Nor did they confine their determinations to matters of importance, but doubtful opinions, which had no great influence on either the doctrines or precepts of Christianity, were made the subjects of fierce contests and positive decisions.

In the declining ages of the Church, when a thick darkness overspread the world, and all the privileges of a Christian, and the liberties of a man, were trampled under the feet of a tyrannical domination, which universally prevailed, this use of Confessions was, among other things, miserably perverted, and prostituted to serve the worst and cruellest designs. Popes and Councils possessed themselves of the sacred authority of the Scriptures, and claimed a blind and undisputed submission to their infallible decrees; and fire and sword were the necessary arguments to support opinions which disdained to submit to a fair examination.

At the Reformation, when our heroic fathers made so glorious a stand for their Christian liberty, and threw off the shameful yoke which had been wreathed by Rome about the neck of the world, though they received the Holy Scriptures as the only rule of their faith, and detested any pretended infallibility which could be claimed by Popes and Councils, and an absolute submission to their decisions; yet they did not altogether reject Creeds and Confessions: but, rectifying the great abuses of them, still continued them as a means of preserving the purity of Christian doctrine, and preventing the spread of heresy.

Hence all the Protestant Churches obliged at least their ministers to disclaim those errors which then obtained, and were in greatest hazard of being propagated, and to own those momentous truths which any heretics endeavoured to overturn; and for that end to subscribe the public Confessions, that were adapted to the different circumstances of the several Churches. They hereby also intended to maintain an uniformity and harmony in the public administrations of the Church, which is of so great consequence to its peace and happiness; and to secure it against those animosities and disorders which must naturally flow from the pastors of any place teaching the people different and contradictory opinions.

Agreeably hereto the Duke of Wirtemberg expresses himself in the preface to the Wirtemberg Confession: "It would be to the great injury of men, if either the fountain, from which all drink, were poisoned, or the public money adulterated: but the injury would be much greater if the heavenly doctrine, on which the safety of the universal Church depends, were corrupted by vanity and impiety. We have determined, therefore, to put forth this our written Confession, which contains, in few words, the sum of our doctrine, that we may preserve pure and entire the fountain of true saving knowledge in the Churches of our country, and protect from corruption, so far as lies in our power, the coin which bears the image of our Heavenly Father." This end of Confessions is in like manner accounted for by the Polonian Churches: "This common consent of ours," say they, "has not only been faithfully maintained hitherto by us, but moreover renewed and confirmed in several General Synods—those who appeared to fan the flame of strife being ingenuously corrected, and brought back within the limits of peace, so as to be more closely bound by the ties of concord and brotherly love." And, after mentioning some other designs of their Confession, they add what follows:—"And if perchance there should be found even amongst us some self-seekers who endeavour to disturb the common tranquillity, and occasion offence, and, abusing the patience of the brethren, refuse to desist, even when admonished, the just rigour of ecclesiastical discipline is ready to be exercised against them, that they may be restrained, and that the contumacious may be excluded from our Church and communion by the authority of the Synodical Canons." For this end also the Articles of the Church of England are said to be composed, "for the avoiding of the diversities of opinions, and for the establishing of consent touching true religion." And it shall appear more particularly afterwards, how far, and in what manner, the Confession of the Church of Scotland is made subservient to this end.

But with how constant and general soever a consent the Christian Churches have required from their ministers or members an assent to the several articles of faith established by them, this use of Confessions has had many adversaries, *and is exclaimed against and opposed by a variety of parties,*

who, though they agree in a common disesteem and aversion to Creeds, may be moved herein by very different springs, and pursue different ends.

In general, the warmest opposition, and the loudest clamours against Confessions, have been raised by those who, being the lesser and weaker part of the society, had not the framing of them, nor were able to adapt the public standard to their own favourite schemes and notions. Such were angry at Confessions, not so much because of their absurdity or inconveniencies, but because they were not theirs; and a change of this little circumstance would have soon dissipated all the frightful images of tyranny, and ignorance, and imposition, whereby they had rendered compositions of this nature so extremely terrible, and at once reconciled them to liberty, and religion, and learning.

Every day's experience shows how natural it is for the greatest part of mankind to grumble at measures of which they have not the direction, and to represent the determination of any society as unjust and arbitrary, when the reins of government are not in their own hands; nor is it improbable but this is the secret spring which hath in all ages given vigour to the contempt and hatred shown to Articles of Faith. Those who were outvoted in Councils, became easily impressed with prejudices against all their actings, and soon entertained unfavourable notions of the authority which they claimed; and whenever an established Confession contradicted their particular opinions, it awakened their resentment, and soured their temper, and they looked upon such a Confession as their declared enemy. They were, therefore, naturally led, not only to vilify and expose it, but to give the most hateful and despicable ideas of all Creeds and Confessions, that thereby they might effectually blunt the edge of a weapon which they saw turned against them. And as vanity, pride, and ambition, these strong selfish passions, thus intermixed themselves with the question, and animated their quarrel with Confessions of Faith, it will be easily conceived, how warm and zealous the opposition to them would become. And though we are far from thinking that this should be applied to all those who differ from us in their sentiments concerning the Articles of Faith; yet we

are afraid, that what a great man said upon another occasion, concerning reason, may be applied to the present purpose, "That seldom any are against Confessions, but when Confessions are against them."

Besides what we have now observed, there are many whose opinions in other matters influence their notions concerning Confessions, and determine them to treat works of this nature as useless if not hurtful compositions,—such as those who maintain that the disbelief of any particular doctrines is no great hindrance to the eternal happiness of a person, provided he live up to his knowledge, and act agreeably to his sentiments; and who stretch their charity so far as to think that men of all the parties of Christianity, or even of any of the different religions which prevail in the world, may have an almost equal claim to the favour of God, and be saved according to the different methods of religion which they embrace;—all which persons must naturally despise Confessions of Faith, the very being whereof is founded upon the absolute necessity or vast importance of the *belief of some articles*, in order to a person's being admitted to the communion of the Church, or at least received as a public Teacher in it.

And as the doctrine of religion is of small moment with them, all the means of preserving its purity, and any ties whereby men can be bound to maintain it, must appear insignificant and arbitrary; nor will they be at pains to keep a guard upon that, the losing of which they imagine to be of so small consequence: and therefore the Socinians and others, whose charity in matters of speculation is so widely extensive, look with an unfavourable eye upon Creeds, and become naturally enemies to them. Nor do we believe it will be found an ill-grounded observation, that in proportion to a person's zeal for the doctrines of Christianity, and his opinion of the necessity and excellency of Divine truths, his esteem of Confessions will rise or fall.

As the Arminians do not seem to think an agreement in doctrine of so great moment to a Christian society, nor are so sensibly affected with matters of belief only, they also are no great friends to Confessions, but generally favour a *latitude in things of that nature*. Besides which, the condem-

nation of their opinions by the Synod of Dort, and the hard treatment which they thought they then met with, fretted their minds, and augmented their prejudices against Creeds of every kind, and the Councils which framed them: and therefore we find, that not only the learned Episcopius, but the body of the Remonstrants in the preface to their Confession, though they allow them to be sometimes useful upon other accounts, inveigh bitterly against them as a *test of orthodoxy*, and a boundary within the limits of which the Pastors of the Church should be confined in their administrations.

Confessions of Faith are also no less eagerly opposed by those who are enemies to all government of the Church, independent upon, or distinct from that of the State; and would either entirely abolish that order which is distinguished by the name of Clergy, or at most allow them nothing but what is derived from the civil magistrate, and would give the same rise and nature to their office with any other part of the constitution of the Commonwealth. Such libertines bear a natural grudge at Confessions, in common with every thing that is in any respect ecclesiastical, and pour the same contempt upon them which they do on the ministry itself, and all the institutions of the Church;—besides that it may be justly suspected, that the most zealous advocates of this party are really Deists, disguised with a thin mask of Christianity; and therefore no wonder that they strive, by all the arts they are masters of, to run down any method of preserving in their purity the doctrines of our holy religion, and preventing the spreading of division and heresy. The most celebrated performance of this kind seems to be, “*The Rights of the Christian Church*,” the authors of which bestow a sufficient share of their wit and satire upon this design of Confessions which we are now treating of.

Were these the only enemies which Creeds had to deal with, there would not be so great cause to fear the issue of the contest; and our Church, which still remains persuaded of their usefulness and necessity, would be easy in a dispute where they had only to struggle with the common enemies of Christianity. But it were extremely unjust to affirm, that all the opposition which we find Confessions meet with,

flows from these impure springs of a secret infidelity, or at least a cold unconcern about the doctrines of Christianity; and it must be acknowledged, that persons of a quite different complexion, and who are moved by reasons not so inconsistent with a love to truth, and a sincere value for religion, have conspired in the design of abolishing all Creeds, and human tests of orthodoxy.

Many whom in charity we are bound to believe endowed with real goodness, by a mistaken fondness for the truly noble Protestant principles of liberty and private judgment, and by a misled zeal for the honour of Divine Revelation, and the peculiar authority of the Holy Scriptures, and by other reasons of the like nature, have been insensibly determined to entertain very unfavourable sentiments of Creeds, which they thought were scarcely reconcileable with the sacred prerogatives of the Bible, and the privileges of a Christian, and were afraid could not but be attended with very unhappy consequences; though, no doubt, such plausible prejudices against Confessions have, upon other accounts, found an easier passage into the minds of those who, being dissenters from Established Churches, are, as we noticed above, naturally averse to an authority which they are not masters of, or of such in the Establishment as are conscious of their having departed from the public doctrine of the Church, and embraced opinions inconsistent with its articles.

Such prejudices against Confessions have mightily prevailed of late amongst the English Dissenters, and many have been impressed thereby, as appears particularly by so great a number's having, on the occasion of a late unhappy event, zealously declared their opinion, that no assent to any human forms should be required as a term of Christian or ministerial communion,—that the truths of Divine Revelation should be expressed only in the words and phrases of the Holy Scriptures,—and that all other tests of orthodoxy should be entirely laid aside.

The same thoughts of Confessions seem also to be entertained by those of the Church of England who are the most zealous advocates for liberty, and claim a just share of *our esteem* for their unwearied labours in defence of so

glorious a cause, and their heroic opposition to civil or ecclesiastical tyranny. Several of the most noted ministers and celebrated authors in Geneva and Switzerland,—such as the younger Turretine, Ostervald, and Werenfels,—may perhaps be reckoned of the same party, and appear plainly enough to have received very different notions of Confessions from what those Churches formerly entertained.

There are a great many passages in several authors which touch this question; but, so far as we have had occasion to know, it is most directly handled, and the arguments against Creeds are most plausibly represented, by the Remonstrants in the preface to their Confession, and Episcopius's Defence of it; by an anonymous writing, entitled, *De pace ecclesie restituenda consilium*, published by Le Clerc in his *Bibliothèque choisie*, tom. 7, p. 401; by "*The Rights of the Christian Church*;" and, principally, by the ingenious author of the *Occasional Paper*,^s vol. 2, numb. 1, *Of Orthodoxy*; where that matter is discoursed of with the greatest strength, or rather speciousness of argument, and the most beautiful embellishments of wit and language, as well as with the keenest edge of satire; and where, at the same time that Creeds are exposed in the severest manner, a regard is still maintained for Religion, and sacred matters are treated with a becoming decency and reverence.

And indeed this is what affects us in the most sensible manner, that in defending the use our Church makes of her Confession, we have to deal with friends as well as enemies, and are obliged to enter the lists with those with whom we agree almost in every thing else, and yet disagree so unfortunately about the necessary methods of maintaining the purity of that faith for which we all profess an equal regard.

II. That we may give our readers a full and impartial view of this matter, and do all the justice we are able to those from whom we find ourselves obliged to differ, we shall, as shortly as may be, represent the grounds upon which the clamour that has of late been made against Confessions is raised, and the reasons which have determined many learned and sober men to form notions so much to their disadvantage. Nor shall we willingly dissemble any

thing that may justify the violent opposition made to articles of faith, or may tend to render the arguments against them either more convincing or more plausible.

They think, then, that any tests of orthodoxy of human composure seem inconsistent with that noble fundamental principle of the Reformation, the absolute perfection and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures to all the purposes of truth and salvation; that it is in the sacred writings alone we can find the genuine doctrines of Christianity, where they are expressed with a just extent and perspicuity; and, therefore, any other forms of doctrine become absolutely useless. They think, that no phrases can be so well adapted to the nature of Divine things, or calculated to preserve the purity of religion, as those which the Holy Ghost, inspiring the sacred writers, has thought fit to use; and that, therefore, the forming Creeds, consisting of the words of men's wisdom, is a notorious disrespect to the sacred writings, and inconsistent with that high esteem and veneration which should be paid them. That it argues a presumptuous confidence, as if men could devise expressions that are more proper or clearer than those of the sacred oracles; or as if the purity of faith could be better maintained by human inventions than by a steady adherence to the only rule of our faith, and by thinking and speaking as it does. It seems to be an evident encroachment upon the authority of the Bible, to set up subordinate rules of faith, which shall share with it in the deciding of controversies, and be appealed to as a touchstone of truth; and that, with whatever fair colourings such a pretence may be varnished over, it really undermines the foundations of our religion, tends to create in the people a disesteem and neglect of the Scriptures, to make them build their faith upon a human model, and form their judgment of others, not by the conformity of their sentiments to Divine Revelation, but by their implicit assent to the established Creeds; upon which account, those who are zealous for the honour of Divine Revelation, cannot fail to apprehend the dismal consequences of pretensions so injurious to it, and look down with anger and contempt upon its unworthy rivals.

The very frame and design of Confessions seem to them

also to be an invasion upon the rights of mankind, and the liberties of a Christian, by which every person has a title to examine impartially all doctrines proposed to him, and then judge for himself, especially in matters of eternal importance, and which respect a religion, that not only allows, but commands, the strictest inquiry into all the parts of it; and which can never subsist without a freedom of thought, and a rational choice. No man, therefore, or society of men, have authority to judge for another, and compose systems of doctrines to which they can demand his assent. And as such a claim is assuming and arbitrary, so it is mean and inglorious in a Christian to submit to it, and, contrary to the commands of his heavenly Master, to call any man *Rabbi* upon earth: "And he who yields his neck to this yoke easily, betrays and gives up the most valuable and inalienable right of a reasonable creature, to think for himself, see with his own eyes, and in every matter to judge according to the best light he can get of the true merits of a cause."

It appears to them also, that the authority claimed, even by the Protestant Confessions of Faith, rests upon the same foundation on which the Church of Rome has erected so exorbitant a domination, and supported by the like pretences; and that all Creeds gradually tend to the same execrable tyranny usurped by that Church,—that it is extremely hard to conceive what submission can be required to any human composures, without establishing them into rules of faith, and laying a foundation for their being exalted to the same high place that is invaded by the Papal decrees,—that this has been the constant tendency of such composures, and an elevation they aspired to,—and that all the plausible distinctions that were made by their abettors, and the modest and fair appearances they might put on at the beginning, served only to impose upon the weakness of the people, and make attempts of this kind more dangerous.

For, as the learned Episcopius tells us, "The devil knows that tyranny is universally abhorred by mankind, and therefore he is too cunning to attempt the barefaced promoting of it. He more artfully slips in by undiscerned chinks, and gradually winds himself into a station to which he could not make his way by the straight road. First, he persuades

men, in order to preserve the purity of doctrine, to compose Confessions about matters that are not absolutely necessary to be known or believed, and thus far the affair goes on easily. Then he urges a consent to these articles as a bond of peace and union. Good still! Next, measures must be taken that this consent be kept inviolable. This also is specious enough, and is an encouragement to farther advances; therefore he loudly cries up the necessity of forms and creeds to be subscribed, so as not only a consent, but a perseverance in that consent, may be promised. And this is the first visible step to the tyranny of men, and tyrannical Confessions of Faith. By this way, it is not hard for the devil to ascend to the highest elevation of tyranny; especially if such a Creed be venerable for its antiquity, and, unshaken, hath outbraved many persecutions; if it has been stoutly defended against adversaries, and be fortified and recommended by the blood of martyrs who adhered to it; all these are supports and helps by which the devil makes way for establishing the most ambitious aims of human authority."

And as the power grasped at by the Church of Rome is of the most fatal consequence to the liberties of mankind, and overthrows the most essential principles of all religion, they are justly jealous of the least approaches to it, and are persuaded they ought to guard against the first appearances of that monstrous power, and therefore abandon all human creeds, the authority whereof they think looks that way.

Upon this account also, they think that those Protestants which impose such Confessions upon any man, are still more inexcusable than the Papists: "And that men who separate from the Church of Rome on the foot of a private judgment; that pretend to no infallibility, and own the Bible to be a perfect adequate rule, that needs no additions to eke it out, and make it a complete directory,—that men that live and breathe upon this principle, and can justify their own conduct by nothing else,—that they, while they are engaged in a pretended defiance to this implicit faith, should yet make their own sentiments and darling opinions the standard of truth and orthodoxy, is both an iniquity and a folly not to be endured."

It is to be observed also, in their opinion, that Confessions

are only engines of force and power;—that they are framed by such as are uppermost, subservient to their own schemes and designs, and must always follow the dictates and notions of the majority, upon whom error and fancy have generally a stronger influence than truth and reason, and therefore seem of very little weight in determining a question, and extremely unfit tools to promote the interest of truth and freedom. They hinder men from an impartial inquiry, and prepossess their minds with prejudices. They naturally beget in their admirers a mean, narrow, and confined turn of thought, and contract all his faculties of reasoning within the little bounds of a system, or a creed made to his hand. They are the greatest discouragement to learning and advances in knowledge, by the hardships to which they expose any that shall dare to make further progress than his neighbours in the discoveries of truth, or recede from the old maxima. They make men afraid of rectifying their mistakes, and hinder them from an unbiassed search, lest thereby they should find the falsehood or uncertainty of any article of a Creed which they have obliged themselves to maintain: “And thus they are the greatest enemy, and the most effectual impediment, to the making or publishing any new discoveries, how important, demonstrable, or useful soever they be. They are a noble security against growing wiser than those who went before us.”

Such Creeds appear also to them to give their votaries little and unworthy notions of Christianity, and of Church communion, and to make them confine these within the limits of their own party and schemes, and so tend to beget in them a sour, uncharitable, persecuting disposition;—to inspire them with rage and fierceness against those who differ from them, and an impatience of the least contradiction,—and so inflame their passions, as to make them deaf to all consideration and cool thought. They breed in men a haughty and imperious temper, and feed them with the fancy that every man should think as they do, and thereby foment hatred and animosities, till at length men arrive at the insolence to usurp the judgment-seat of Christ, and excommunicate and anathematize all those who disagree with them, and thereby they are of a spirit entirely opposite to the

genius of Christianity, and counteract the great design of it. They have a fatal tendency to extinguish these noble virtues of our religion—an unbounded love, a diffusive charity, a mutual forbearance, and a management of all differences and disputes with meekness, humility, and an openness of mind. Therefore they are of the most dangerous consequence to the peace and happiness of mankind, a scandal to our holy profession, and absolutely inconsistent with the Apostle's rule: "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."

It may be alleged also, that such tests of orthodoxy, and determinations of Councils, are extremely prejudicial to the interests of goodness and holiness among their admirers. They make them nauseate practical religion, and fill their heads with airy schemes of a fruitless speculation, and divert them from the main business of Christianity. Such love naturally to be more employed in matters of doubtful disputation, than in a sincere obedience to the laws of the Gospel, and a regular government of their passions and appetites. They come easily to depend upon their supposed orthodoxy, and make up with it the want of more valuable qualities; and thus a contentious zeal, a dogmatical stiffness of opinion, a sour and scornful usage of others, with a proud and uncharitable spirit of imposition and anathematizing, fill the room of all the noble and amiable graces of religion.

They think further, that their notions of the nature and tendency of Creeds is justified by the history of the Church in all ages, which shows that they have been the springs and the fomenters of numberless divisions and disorders, whereby the Church has been torn to pieces, and true religion entirely lost amongst the fierce combatants;—that they have been often framed to entangle the consciences of mankind, to stifle truth and light, and serve the worst and basest purposes;—that cunning and ambitious men have made use of them as engines to serve their lust of power, their avarice, and their cruelty, and have framed them so as to exclude *from any influence* in Church or State those whose eminent

qualities they apprehended gave them a better title than themselves to the esteem of the public;—that there have been numberless examples, where, by the help of these tests of orthodoxy, ignorant, revengeful, and self-conceited persons, have overclouded the brightest merit, and oppressed the loveliest virtues; and, instead of a real zeal for truth, have thence taken occasion to gratify their passions, and raise their reputations with a blind multitude upon the ruins of the best men and Christians:—in a word, that, in order to forcing an assent to such human composures, the bloodiest persecutions have been raised, and incredible numbers sacrificed for a trifle;—that as these melancholy effects soon appeared in the Church, so the disease still increased, and no bounds were set to the humour of creed-making.

For in the first ages different Councils met, and positive decisions were hastily made about opinions of no moment,—contradictory to one another, and frequently, on both sides, to common sense. And yet they disputed them with an invincible obstinacy, and imposed them upon one another with the utmost violence; which was often attended with a mutual hatred, and anathemas, to the utter distraction of the Church, and neglect of the great duties of our religion. For to so low an ebb was Christianity reduced by these methods, that peace, and love, and charity, were offered as a victim to so airy and contemptible a thing as the day of the celebration of Easter. Nor was there any thing so insignificant, but at length Doctors came to wrangle about it, and Councils to decide and impose it: and, with the loss of meekness and forbearance, the substantial truths of the Gospel were changed into inactive lifeless schemes; and religion dwindled into thin subtleties, and entangled intricacies. To remedy all these evils, they think the only way is, to adhere closely to the Scriptures, and reject all human composures as tests of orthodoxy,—to express Divine truths only in the words of the inspired writers,—and secure to every man the liberty of private judgment.

In such a case they flatter themselves we should soon see a happy change on the face of things. Religion would flourish, an universal love would diffuse itself, and peace and virtue again revive; moderation would be the ornament of a

dispute, and minds that were united by charity and goodwill would sooner arrive at a harmony of sentiments also ; or at least differences in speculation would not be attended with so black a train of mischiefs, nor banish away practical goodness ;—freedom of thought and learning would be encouraged, and advances made in every part of knowledge ;—truth would not be oppressed by power, nor the understandings of mankind fettered in shackles of human forging.

III. Thus we have represented the chief things which may be brought to support the sentiments of those who are declared enemies to Confessions ; which we thought necessary, in order to give impartial light to the controversy, and have been so far from disguising any thing that is plausibly said by those who differ from us, that, on the contrary, we have endeavoured to give their cause all the strength that so narrow a compass could admit of. And it must be acknowledged, that these reasonings are extremely plausible ; and they may in some measure excuse the opposition made to Creeds, though they cannot justify it. For we hope it will appear, that the practice of our Church at least is perfectly consistent with the honour of the Scriptures, and the liberties of mankind ;—that it has none of the alleged pernicious consequences, but is in many respects necessary and advantageous ;—and that the objections we have mentioned, strike only against those who abuse Confessions, or flow from an unacquaintedness with the just foundations upon which any Church may require an assent to such forms of doctrine : so that the adversaries to Creeds strive to abolish what they should only reform ; and, instead of rectifying abuses, destroy these forms, and unhinge all order and government.

[The Author here recites the Acts of Parliament and of the General Assembly relating to the establishment and subscription of the Confession of Faith, which will be found in the Appendix.—Ed.]

There might be several different methods taken in order to vindicate the use which our Church makes of her Confession. The account which the Holy Scriptures give us of the constitution of the Church, and of the duty of its rulers,—the obligations which they are laid under to main-

tain and propagate the truth, to preserve the doctrine of Christianity in its original simplicity and purity, and guard the Church from being infected by the contagion of error, to resist gainsayers, and reject obstinate heretics,—the authority of discipline, and the native design of ecclesiastical censures, together with the right which ecclesiastical officers have to employ the necessary means for attaining these valuable ends, might all be improved to good purpose in the defence of Confessions.

But because the supporting them upon this foundation would necessarily engage us in many intricate questions about Church Government, and the nature and extent of the authority with which its rulers are invested, whose very being is denied by many who confidently affirm, that there can be no government but that of the State, and disclaim any proper ecclesiastical constitution distinct from the civil; and since there are innumerable disputes raised by learned men, concerning the measures and the uses of that power with which Synods and Councils are endued by the laws of Christ; we shall entirely waive the consideration of matters, the clearing and establishing of which would be inconsistent with the nature and design of this treatise; and, instead of this method of defence, shall essay to prove, that the Church of Scotland, when obliging all her ministers, and other ecclesiastical officers, to subscribe her Confession of Faith, does nothing but what she has a just title to do by the common principles of reason, and the natural inalienable rights of mankind. And as we may afterwards have opportunity to consider any obligation which our Church is supposed to bring all her members under to her articles of faith, our reasoning at this time will chiefly regard the public officers of the Church, and the ties by which they are bound to her Confession.

As it is not designed upon this occasion to compose a complete treatise upon this subject, we shall lay before our readers the principles upon which a larger vindication of Creeds may be built, and such observations as, it is hoped, may be sufficient to answer the most plausible objections against them, in that natural unconfined manner which essays of this kind have a claim to, without pretending to

observe the forms of an elaborate method; only thus far we shall endeavour to range our thoughts in a distinct order; as, *first*, to mention the general foundation upon which any Church may require subscriptions to public Formulas by her ministers; *next*, to consider the principal arguments which the enemies to Creeds boast of for their strength and importance; *after* which we shall account for the reasons which moved our Church to make use of the right she has to require such an assent to her Confession, and the manifold advantages and great necessity of this practice.

1. As freedom is the birthright of mankind, any number of persons may voluntarily unite themselves, to such purposes, and under such regulations, as appear useful and convenient to them, provided they be agreeable to the rights of others, and the rules of justice. Nor could any foreigner pretend to intrude himself into a society which is founded upon consent, or usurp the management of its concerns.

Religion is the brightest glory of rational creatures, and their most important business; it diffuses itself through all the circumstances and conditions of life, and is founded in our very beings: wherefore, in all the relations which men can be placed in, a regard to our Maker should exert itself, and they ought all to be improved for that purpose; nor can a person be considered in any state, either of solitude or society, but it should appear that he is a religious creature. This then is the noblest spring of union amongst men, and that society is bound together by the greatest tie, which is designed for the honour and service of God. It must be therefore infinitely reasonable, that mankind should unite together in worshipping assemblies,—join in a body for the praise and adoration of their common Lord and Maker,—and entertain communion and fellowship with one another as His people. And as we are led by the light of nature to form societies for these excellent purposes, so we are expressly obliged to it by the laws of the Gospel, which give us a more exalted and enlarged idea of that union which ought to be amongst Christians, who through the whole world compose *one divine body*—united to Christ as their Head and Lord—

animated by the same spirit—governed by the same ruler—and engaged in the same interests.

As every man must *judge for himself, and answer to God for his own soul*, he has a right, independent of another, to choose what religion he will embrace, and to join himself to that society of Christians which, in his judgment, enjoys the greatest purity, and conformity to the constitutions of the Gospel, and where he may best promote his eternal happiness. Nor can any man, unless he shows a plain commission from Heaven, which he will never be able to produce, pretend to judge in matters of religion for another, and oblige him to a compliance with his dictates.

In like manner, every religious society has a natural privilege of worshipping in that way which, according to their most impartial views of things, seems most agreeable to Divine Revelation,—of ordering all matters of joint concern to the whole body,—and of acting in every case as they believe themselves directed by the supreme rule of faith and manners. Nor can any man thrust himself into the society without their consent, or force them to entertain communion with him contrary to their own consciences; since this were a plain usurpation upon the liberties of a body entirely independent of him. If it appear to them, that, according to the constitutions of the Gospel, there ought to be some peculiarly devoted to the service of religion,—the business of whose life it should be to explain and confirm the doctrines of Christianity to the people, to raise their esteem and veneration of them, and animate them in the study and practice of sincere religion,—to whom should be committed the Government of the Church, and the administration of the Word and Sacraments, they have a title, founded upon the natural rights of mankind, to appoint such ecclesiastical officers amongst them, and to assist and submit to them in the exercise of the powers which they believe their great Master has intrusted to them for these ends.

As every society united for these purposes has a right to determine to whose government and instruction it shall submit in its spiritual concerns; so it must naturally have a power to judge concerning the necessary qualifications of persons whom they design to intrust with that sacred office; and to

confine such an authority over them to those who can give reasonable satisfaction, that they are in some measure fitted to advance the purposes for the sake of which such rulers are established in the society. Nor can, in any justice, a man, though he thinks himself extremely qualified to advance these ends, intrude himself into a society which thinks otherwise. This were evidently to subject them to his opinion, and to usurp an arbitrary power over them. No candidate, therefore, for the office, can reasonably complain of hard treatment, though, in order to his obtaining it, a just satisfaction be demanded as to his necessary qualifications; and the society find themselves, not him, judges of these qualifications.

It may be easily supposed, that the principal things which any society will require in their public teachers, respect his practice and his faith;—his practice, that it be suitable to the designs of his work, and such as may recommend that religion the honour and interest of which he is devoted to; and for this end they may use all proper means to attain a just character of him, and sufficient information of the manner of his *life*. As one great design of a public minister is, to explain, illustrate, and commend to the consciences of his hearers, the doctrine of salvation, to vindicate it from the cunning and poison of heresy, and stand for the defence of the Gospel; it is plainly reasonable, that a society which proposes these ends by submitting to their pastors, ought to have just security as to their fitness to promote them; and therefore they may demand satisfaction as to a candidate's *knowledge*, and natural or acquired abilities, that they may be sure they make a wise choice, and that the man whose business it is to teach others, understand sufficiently the subject himself. Nor is it less allowable for them to be careful that he have not himself sucked in the contagion of error, and departed from that faith which it is their intention he should clear up and recommend to them; and to be assured, that he embraces and adheres to the "doctrine according to godliness." It were unwise to think, that any person could be qualified to preach, and apply to the purposes of the Christian life, a doctrine which he himself *disbelieves*, or could contribute to promote and improve

opinions which he has a detestation or a disregard for; and it were as ridiculous to imagine, that any society should, by intrusting such a person, act in a direct contradiction to the very design which they had placed directly before their eyes, in the institution of the office committed to him.

As every private person has a natural right to judge for himself in matters of religion, and to pitch upon those opinions which, after his best endeavours, he sees worthy of his choice and most agreeable to reason and revelation, and in the further knowledge and improvement of which he endeavours to be assisted by those who may be most helpful to him; so any number of such united into a body, seem to have evidently the same privilege; and every society must have the liberty to judge for themselves, what faith they would have preached to them, and what doctrines they desire to have placed in a clearer light, and daily urged home upon their consciences, in their strength and purity, in order to their advancing in the knowledge of the Son of God, and in the ways of truth and holiness. Nor can any other assume an authority over them, either to oblige them to hear doctrines which they disbelieve and disregard, or hinder them from being instructed and animated in that faith which their consciences teach them they ought to embrace, and from making choice for their pastors of such persons only who will do it; since this were to claim a power over others who have an equal freedom of thought, and to judge, not only for himself, but for his neighbour. Each person, then, and every society, has a title, founded in the nature of things, to determine for themselves, what doctrines and articles of faith they expect the belief of, and conformity to, from all their pastors, as a necessary qualification of the persons whom she receives as her ministers. For which effect it must be allowable for the rulers of that society, to take all proper measures by which it may be discovered, whether a person is in this respect qualified for an ecclesiastical office; and particularly by his own profession of his faith, and his assurance, that he believes and embraces those doctrines of Christianity.

If, in a degenerate and corrupt age, the most plain and momentous truths are denied by those who pretend to own

the Scriptures, and the most mischievous errors are propagated by subtle and deceitful disputers, who pervert the sacred writings to favour opinions directly contradictory to them, professing to acknowledge the letter, while they have departed from the spirit and the sense of the holy oracles ; and thereby a declaration of one's faith only in the precise words of Scripture, thus wrested and subtilized, can no wise distinguish between those who hold and teach the most opposite doctrines, or give any tolerable satisfaction to the society concerning their faith ; they may justly demand of any who pretends to become their pastor, that he express his opinions in such words as have least ambiguity in them, and are most calculated, according to the circumstances of time and place, to the ends proposed hereby, namely, a well-grounded assurance of his orthodoxy (if the use of so frightful a word may be pardoned) ; or, which is the same thing, they may require an assent to their public Creeds and Confessions, which are the words the society is supposed to judge the best adapted for affording them this satisfaction.

Such a society, indeed, of fallible men, are, no doubt, exposed to mistakes : they may either believe what is really a falsehood, or they may fancy a true doctrine of more importance than it is, and thereby be led to require a qualification in all their ministers, which it had been wiser, and more for their advantage, they had not been so solicitous about. But this does not at all alter the matter : for, as it is in the case of a private person, such a society, if it errs, errs only for itself, and must follow its own light ; and it were extremely unreasonable to imagine, that so long as their conscience dictates to them, that a regard for God and their souls obliges them to have such a concern for the truth, the moment of which is questioned, they should leave their own judgment, and be influenced by the fancy and authority of another just as fallible as themselves.

As there is no argument in reason which determines the bounds within which such a society should be confined, or fixes the number that may justly unite together for those purposes, there seems to be nothing that should hinder any number of lesser religious societies, to form themselves into a larger body, designed for promoting the same ends, and

endued with the like privileges: and when the greater part of a nation enter into a society of this nature, there will arise what may be understood by a National Church; and the articles of faith received by them, and established as a test of the doctrinal qualifications of their pastors, will become a National Confession.

These are a few of the plain and easy maxims of nature, which are sufficient to justify the Church of Scotland in the measures she has taken with regard to the establishment and obligation of her Confession.

Our Church was united together by the same faith and hope; the members of it embraced the truths contained in her Confession as the uncorrupted doctrines of salvation,—they believed them most agreeable to Divine revelation, and the genius of Christianity, and that they were admirably suited to promote practical religion in the lives of men,—and had upon that account the brightest characters of that *doctrine which is according to godliness*. In that faith, therefore, our Church desired to be instructed and enlivened; it was that she wanted to have taught her by the ministers of the Gospel; and the dictates of her conscience determined her to join in that worship, and hearken to that teaching, which was founded upon and adapted to that faith. So far as these articles were departed from, she was persuaded the light of truth was overclouded, and the sacred oracles perverted; and that ministers in preaching, or people in hearing, what was contrary thereto, in so far missed the end, or rather were placed in opposition to the very end, which was proposed by the institution of public teachers.

This being the case, she was persuaded that she had an inherent right, founded as deep as nature, to confine her choice of ministers to such as would preach those doctrines; and that none had a title to intrude into the society against her consent, or oblige her to counteract her own judgment in order to gratify theirs. She saw that it was impossible for any to give her this satisfaction as to the soundness of their doctrine, without openly explaining themselves, in other phrases than those precise ones which are to be found in the Holy Scriptures; and that therefore Confessions of Faith, plain and direct, were necessary for this end; a sub-

scription to which she thought, upon that account, her duty to require from all ministers, and other ecclesiastical persons; in the appointment whereof, authority of both kinds—civil and sacred, acts of Parliament and Assembly—concurred.

An impartial consideration of what has been already remarked, may serve to convince our adversaries that those very *maxims of liberty* which they glory in, and would appropriate to themselves, are props firm enough to support all the weight of that *authority* which the Creeds of our Church pretend to. Though there needs nothing to vindicate them, but the fundamental principles of society, and the natural rights of rational creatures, yet it, no doubt, is a mighty confirmation of the use which our Church has made of these rights, in establishing her Confessions, and yields a sensible pleasure, that it appears to us that the commands of our Saviour, and the train of the Gospel institutions, approve our conduct, and point out to us the way we follow.

From these sacred oracles we are convinced, that a free choice is the very soul of religion, and every man must follow the dictates of his conscience;—that Christians should be united together by the strictest ties of harmony, and formed into the most exalted and affectionate society, designed for the noblest purposes, and mutually attracted by the highest principles of union,—*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*;—that in this divine society there should be some peculiarly devoted to the service of God and religion, the pastors and rulers of the Church—one part of whose province is, to hold forth the doctrine of Christianity in its light and purity, and improve it with the greatest efficacy towards the advancement of truth and holiness;—and that the doctrines of religion are far from being represented by the inspired apostles as airy speculations, which might be freely disputed away; nor do they leave it indifferent, either to the pastors or people, what they should teach or hear; but the first are plainly commanded “to take heed to their doctrine;” “in doctrine to show uncorruptedness, and to use sound speech that cannot be condemned;” they are discharged to teach any other doctrine, or “give heed to fables and endless genealogies;” and all the people are exhorted to stability in *the faith*, and “to be no more children, tossed to and fro,

and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men;" and "to mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which they have learned, and avoid them."

It will not perhaps seem a very difficult and intricate observation, that no man can obey these rules, and show uncorruptedness of doctrine in teaching others, who does not receive the purity of faith himself; and that a Christian society would act a very unwise part did they commit the teaching or improvement of that doctrine to a man who declined a naked acknowledgment of his own opinion concerning it, and who strove to conceal his real sentiments under the cover of subtle distinctions, or doubtful phrases of an obscure or variable signification.

It may not be unfit to acquaint our readers, that in the foregoing reasoning, and the improvement we would have made of the preceding maxims, we consider the Church purely as a Christian society entered into for spiritual purposes; and we abstract from any authority and support she may acquire from the State, and from her interests and concerns, in so far as they are blended with the Civil Government of a kingdom where she may be established by law;—because circumstances of a political nature are foreign to the essential constitution of this divine society. She may subsist and flourish where her external condition is entirely different; the same rules may be observed then, and the same measures taken, with regard to the purity of doctrine, as we find was done during those ages when Christianity was shut out of the court and the temple. The Westminster Confession at this time is applied to the same purposes by the Dissenters of Ireland, for which it is legally established in the Church of Scotland.

2. The principles which have been laid down, and the usefulness of them for the vindication of Confessions, will be further illustrated and confirmed, after we have examined the most plausible objections which the adversaries of Creeds load them with; to the consideration of which we shall now proceed.

(1.) The first and most noisy argument whereby endea-

vours are made to run down all Creeds, and expose them to contempt and hatred, is, "That they are in their own nature an arbitrary and tyrannical invasion upon the natural rights of mankind, whereby every man has a title to judge for himself, and not to be imposed upon by the determinations of others, whether private persons, or Councils and Churches; that,—for any to form Creeds, and make their own sentiments and darling opinions the standard of truth and orthodoxy, is to usurp an authority over the consciences of men, founded upon the maxims of Popery, and directly contrary to the spirit of the Reformation; and, therefore, as it is an attempt to be abhorred in everybody, so it is particularly inexcusable in Protestants, who separate from the Church of Rome upon the foot of private judgment; and seems to argue, that though they plead for a liberty of dissenting from everybody else, yet they would fain keep others from exercising their own judgments, in following the dictates of their own minds, and that while they are engaged in a pretended defiance to implicit faith. Besides, it is alleged, that it is contrary to our avowed principle, *That the Scriptures are the only rule by which we are to try all opinions, and determine all controversies*, for a Church at the same time to claim an authority in matters of faith, decide disputable questions, and either absolve or condemn men, according to their own *Formulas*, as well as the Scriptures."

We hope, how formidable soever this reasoning may appear, that the following account of that authority which our Church may claim, as sufficient for all the ends of our Confessions, and of our real sentiments in this controversy, will wipe off the aspersions thrown upon us, and sufficiently vindicate our character and practice. And we need only apply to the present question some of those maxims laid down as the ground-work upon which the authority of Creeds may be built.

Our Church never dreamed what the Papists so confidently affirm of themselves, that she is in any respect infallible, raised above the common imperfections of human understanding; but with an open sincerity acknowledges, that Councils and Synods since the apostolical times may err, and *have erred*; and as a native consequence of this, she is far

from imagining that her judgment is a certain argument of the truth or falsehood of any proposition,—or requiring an implicit faith in her determinations. No persons maintain with a more fervent zeal, and put a greater value upon the liberty of Christians, and the right of private judgment, than we do; or with a greater indignation and contempt abhor the tyranny of the Romish Church, or any arbitrary claims that may be made by others over the consciences of the people; nor (as we hope it will evidently appear to an unprejudiced eye) do we cover her ambitious inclinations with a pretended zeal for liberty, and under another denomination grasp that overgrown authority which she professes to abandon.

Those who run down all Confessions as engines of a spiritual domination and lust of power, and give it out that this is the chief purpose for which all Churches, and particularly ours, endeavour to establish them, betray their small acquaintance with our principles, and too much of those uncharitable and self-flattering passions which they so unjustly charge home upon their neighbours, and would seem to think themselves entirely purified from.

It is justly enough observed by the author of the *Occasional Paper*, "That it is a very unfair and dishonest evasion, for men who aspire at a dominion over the consciences of others, to think that they can palliate their conduct, and preserve a due regard for the sacred Scriptures, by owning them to be the only rule of faith and manners, while, at the same time, they assume to themselves a power to explain these Scriptures, and, by the help of them, so to determine all controversies, as to oblige the people to an absolute submission,—since it is certain, that an infallible interpreter of Scripture is the self-same thing with a supreme and infallible judge, and the submitting to such imperious commentators were to establish all that can be wished for by the sauciest Pontiff, only without the name of tyranny." But then our Church, by her Confessions, affords no handle for charging this scandal upon her, but leaves it free for every man to examine the sense of particular texts, as well as her doctrines in general, by all those helps which are afforded us for discovering the mind of the Holy Ghost; and we are ever ready

to own, that a Christian ought to embrace that meaning of any passage which appears upon impartial inquiry most agreeable to the intention of the inspired writers, rather than that which a fallible Council may determine to be so.

When, therefore, the Scriptures are annexed to the Westminster Confession, it is not at all pleaded that the application there made should be followed at a venture by the readers, or that it is a sufficient argument, that the Scriptures ought so to be understood as to agree to the improvement which is there made of them. The Assembly produces them as good proofs of the doctrines there affirmed; they think that they are so, and that the Scriptures must be wrested, if they be understood otherwise,—and they hope they shall be able, by the authority of these texts, to defend the truths of the Gospel which they profess, and recommend them to the belief of the unbiassed inquirer. But then, whether they have mistaken the Word of God, or applied it aright, they are willing they should be judged by the reasons which can be brought for it,—and never designed to fetter the understandings of mankind, or bear down and smother a rational inquiry, by the weight of their decisions.

It is not therefore pretended, that human composures, properly speaking, are a standard of orthodoxy, and a test by which an erroneous proposition may be certainly distinguished from a sound one,—nor can a disputer appeal to its decision as a sufficient argument for the truth of his principles; since it is possible, that truth may be on the other side, and falsehood may get into the public Chairs and the established Creeds of a fallible Church. And though we think that the opinion of a great body of men, whose business it is to inquire with the most laborious accuracy into sacred matters, and who, from the nature of their studies, may be generally supposed to understand them more thoroughly than others, ought to make a person modest in opposing his sentiments to theirs, and should engage him to the most impartial inquiry before he abandons or contradicts them; yet we are always ready to own, that he must ever prefer what appears to him founded on Reason or Revelation, to the influence of their Authority,—and that the smallest grain of an *inspired testimony* is momentous enough, in a just balance,

to weigh down a cart-load of human Canons and Confessions.

But the practice of those Churches which embrace Confessions, and particularly of our own, may perhaps appear to some to contradict these principles, and it may seem that we endeavour by false colours to palliate what we cannot openly maintain; since it is certain, that all such Churches decide questions of faith,—claim an authority sufficient for that purpose,—and condemn persons because of their opposition to an established human article; which matters of plain fact seem irreconcilable with what we have just now advanced. And indeed it must be acknowledged, that many learned and pious Protestants speak with abundance of uncertainty and obscurity about the Church's power in determining controversies,—seem not to have expressed clearly enough their sentiments of it,—and have, by doubtful phrases and intricate distinctions, perplexed the minds of men, and afforded no small advantages to the declared enemies of Confessions.

It is not our intention to engage in this laborious dispute, or mention everything that might tend to explain and illustrate the meaning of that article of our Confession (chap. 31) where it is asserted, "That it belongeth to Synods and Councils *ministerially* to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience." Nothing is necessary for us but to give such an account of the Church's authority in matters of faith as will be sufficient for all the purposes and ends of our Confession,—and upon which the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline and censures, in order to make them effectual, may be safely founded; and we shall in a few words explain what we understand by that power which the Church has to decide controversies, so clear and easy, that there will remain no ambiguity, nor any room to suspect that we mean more than we speak out.

Though, therefore, no society of fallible men has a right to determine any article of faith, to declare the falsehood of a proposition, or fix the true meaning of any passages of the Sacred Oracles, so as to oblige others to submit to their decisions, or appeal to them as a touchstone of truth and orthodoxy; yet any Synod or Council, or those to whom

the government of the Christian society is committed, has a proper and direct authority to determine what *articles of faith are embraced by that society*,—what are thought by it of such importance that they should be preached to her, and therefore heartily believed by all her ministers,—and, consequently, to compose a body of such articles of faith as are reputed by that Church necessary qualifications of all those that pretend to an ecclesiastical office amongst them.

And this authority of determining controversies is all that we plead for upon this occasion ; so that when any person is convicted of an opinion contrary to the established Confession, he is not so immediately considered as chargeable with a heresy (since truth and error in matters of religion can be judged only by the Holy Scriptures, and not by any human composites), but only it is made evident that he maintains a principle which that Church is persuaded to be of so pernicious a nature and tendency, that she can receive no man for her teacher who gives just suspicion of his being infected by it, or declines an open renunciation of it ; and consequently, upon its being proved that any has departed from these established articles, it is made evident that he can no longer remain a minister of that Church, or an ecclesiastical officer in a society which has a natural right of embracing those opinions which it sees most agreeable to the inspired writings, and of submitting to such pastors alone who in her judgment maintain the purity of the Christian doctrine in its important articles.

And thus our Confession is a proper standard of ministerial communion in our Church, and a rule whereby it must be judged whether a person, in so far as relates to his principles, be endowed with those qualifications which, after our most impartial consideration, we think we may justly expect in a Gospel minister who would answer the ends for which the sacred office was instituted ; and though what is really truth can never be determined by a majority, we hope there is no absurdity in affirming, that the public rules which any society designs to lay down for the government of it, and particularly for trying the qualifications of persons to be admitted to public offices, may, and indeed must, *necessarily be determined by the majority*.

From what has been now discoursed, it appears, that the determinations of a Council concerning articles of faith, and their decisions of controversies, so far as they relate to the present question, are not founded upon any authority which one set of men have over others to govern their consciences, and make Creeds for them ; but take their rise from that natural power which every man and every society has to follow the dictates of its own understanding,—to embrace that scheme of religion wherein it perceives the greatest lustre of a divine character,—and to submit to those ministers who appear qualified to promote the interests of truth and holiness. And consequently we may with pleasure observe, that the authority of our General Assembly, in her canons and decisions, is founded upon that noble and inalienable privilege of a rational creature, the right of private judgment ; and we shall heartily approve of all the great things that can be said by the warmest lover of freedom, in order to heighten its excellency, as a very important advantage to our cause ; since we shall at least have thereby the same liberty to value, applaud, and adhere to Confessions, which others think they have to vilify and reject them.

Did any society, indeed, oblige people independent of it to incorporate with them, and subscribe to their constitutions and decisions in religious matters ; did they either force an assent to their established Confessions at the beginning, or after the person had once agreed to them ;—did they in a strict sense punish him for an alteration of his sentiments afterwards, and for abandoning the public standard upon a more impartial inquiry, and on that account deprive him of any advantage he had a claim to, *independent of the society* ; this were indeed to exceed the boundaries of private judgment, and could not be justifiable, unless such could produce a right to regulate the judgments of others, and lord it over their faith. But then neither the principles nor practice of our Church lead that way, or are in the least exposed to the objection.

WE ABHOR PERSECUTION IN EVERY SHAPE IN WHICH IT HAS APPEARED, and are never for compelling others to subscribe our Confessions or submit to our institutions ; being sensible, that every man has an equal right with us to fol-

low the light of his understanding, and the dictates of his conscience ; that the terrors of blood and torture are arguments entirely foreign to the design and the spirit of Christianity, can never tend to advance its interests, nor be possibly reconciled with two great fundamental maxims of it—meekness and charity ; and that banishment, confiscations, or imprisonments, are methods of persuasion by which no man, or body of men, have a title to recommend their doctrines to others. We are convinced, that these are not the arms whereby truth and righteousness spread their victories over the minds of men ; and that they are only the tools of error and ignorance, calculated to root out all religion, oppress virtue, and extinguish light. We have as great a horror as the most violent enemies of Confessions at that Antichristian Church which uses these means of conviction, and have as frightful ideas of that monster of tyranny and cruelty, and will ever look upon it as a very bad sign of a cause when it leans upon such supports ; so that we do not deny to others the same liberty which we take to ourselves. And it is hoped it will afterwards appear, that any temporal losses which an ecclesiastical officer with us may be exposed to, when convicted of departing from our established Confession, can in no sense be called persecution, and are of a nature entirely different from it.

Wherefore, however strong and persuasive the reasonings of our adversaries may be against the tyrannical pretensions of the Church of Rome, or the claims of any other which grasps at an authority over the faith of the people,—with whatever hatred and contempt all those human composures should be treated which invade the place due to the Holy Scriptures in the determination of religious controversies, and would fetter the consciences of mankind by their fallible decisions,—and how just and commendable soever the warmest zeal and most vigorous opposition against all projects of this nature are in every man and Christian ; we hope it is evident, that the practice of the Church of Scotland, and the usefulness and allowableness of Confessions as a standard of orthodoxy, in the sense wherein we have explained it, are not in the least exposed or injured thereby ; since they are founded upon *quite* different principles, and tend to very contrary purposes.

And we doubt not our readers will, by an easy application, perceive how little all those strong and vehement reasonings, which we have formerly mentioned, against an usurped power over the understandings of mankind, and in favour of the noble Protestant principle of private judgment, affect our cause,—that all that can be said of the excellency of the Holy Scriptures, and their peculiar prerogative as the only judge of controversies, and standard of truth and error, are perfectly reconcilable with it,—that those frightful images of tyranny, persecution, and slavery, whereby our adversaries endeavour to impress the minds of men with so horrible notions of Confessions in general, are easily dissipated,—and how justly soever they may heighten our terrors at Popery, and all Popish pretensions, that, if applied to us, they are the creatures of fancy, and owe their being to mistaken apprehensions or wilful partiality, and give us ground to complain, that the writers of the other side have not treated us, or our opinions, with that charity, moderation, and impartial inquiry, which they so much glory in.

So little reason have these gentlemen to load our Confession with these calumnies, or charge us with departing from the principles of the Reformation, and raising the authority of our public standards on the same ground which supports the Roman Pontiff, that, on the contrary, there seems to be place enough in the present question for applying the common maxim, “That superstition and atheism—or absolute infidelity and implicit belief—are frequently near one another, and maintain an intimate alliance.” Nor will it perhaps appear an ill-grounded observation, that the noise made by the inveterate enemies of Confessions, tends to clamour the Churches of Christ out of the natural and inalienable rights of mankind,—to overturn private judgment, and oppress our consciences,—and, consequently, that this extreme of imaginary liberty, and these high pretensions to freedom and impartiality, are very apt to meet with the other extreme of arbitrary power, and an haughty imposing spirit.

In order to the clearing of this, we shall but just mention a few consequences that naturally follow from the reasonings and the schemes of that party: namely,—That a society has not power to make rules for its government, that may not be

overturned and transgressed by every man who dislikes them ; That though a Church be convinced in her conscience, that such doctrines only are agreeable to Divine Revelation, and ought to be preached to the people, and therefore she inclines to make choice of such only for her pastors who believe these truths themselves, and will inculcate them upon others ; yet she must be denied that liberty,—a person of principles directly opposite must have access to her pulpits,—nor must he be abandoned or turned out of his office because of differences in opinion ; that is, such a Church must be imposed upon, forced to hear doctrines she thinks inconsistent with her edification and improvement in Christianity ; in other words, persons who desire to attend public ordinances, that they may make progress in the truths of religion, and be animated in its practice, must yet submit to schemes, whereby, instead of gaining this end, they may be entertained from the pulpit with notions very contrary to these purposes, and which, according to their opinion, tend rather to retard than advance them in the ways of holiness, and be obliged to spend the Sabbath in a manner very disagreeable to those designs for which it was sanctified.

According to those noble principles of liberty that are so much boasted of, some men—the greatest pleasure of whose life, and satisfaction to their consciences, it perhaps would be, to be joined to a society of Christians who maintained the unity of faith, and to have access to pure ordinances and uncorrupted doctrine, dispensed by those who were qualified for that office, and had kept themselves free from the poison of error—must yet be denied that privilege, obliged to pollute themselves, by mixing with the impurities of a corrupted ministry, and to have their ears grated by doctrines which they detest as pernicious, or despise as useless or uncertain ;—and so they must be robbed of their greatest joy and comfort, or, which is the same thing, they must be hindered from using what appears to them the necessary means of attaining these benefits, and arriving at a security concerning the faith and qualifications of their teachers.

Because such free-thinkers, entertaining little thoughts of the doctrines of Christianity, are for allowing an unbounded *latitude* in matters of faith,—and, looking upon a person as

neither a worse man or minister for his sentiments in what they are pleased to call *matters of speculation*, would not think of separating from him on that occasion, or requiring a satisfying account of his belief as a necessary qualification for an ecclesiastical office; therefore we who think quite otherwise, and believe that the doctrines of Christianity are of the highest importance, and a denial or contradicting them of the worst consequence to the souls of men, and that the knowledge and faith of them are glorious privileges of the Gospel state, and distinguished characters of a Christian, must act in contradiction to our own understandings, in order to gratify their inclinations,—must be as coldly indifferent as to the interests of truth, and as little concerned about what our pastors and rulers teach and believe.

Because they are fully satisfied as to the orthodoxy of one to whose ministry they would submit, if he own the Scriptures, and express his sentiments in the precise words and phrases to be found there, though he decline giving any other evidence of his soundness, and refuse his assent to articles of faith in any other terms; therefore we, who are persuaded from the fullest experience, that cunning heretics *wrest the Scriptures to their own perdition*, and rack them, that they may come up to their notions,—that they understand these phrases in a quite contrary manner to what others think the plain sense of them, and conceal under that fair varnish the most unscriptural schemes, and detestable errors, and consequently that their using these phrases is no proof what kind of doctrine they embrace,—must, notwithstanding, be contented with the same false and deceitful test of orthodoxy; and if we act the same cautious part that every man will do for the smallest sum of money he gives in loan, by seeking some plainer and less doubtful security for a matter of incomparably greater consequence, we must be treated with contempt, and exposed to public scorn, as sour, morose, narrow-spirited creatures,—misrepresented as favourers of aspiring tyrannical Councils, and enemies to the perfection of the Holy Scriptures, which, as some of the writers on that side affirm, are all engines of cruelty and persecution, as well as external force.

In a word, we may not be allowed to value, esteem, and

embrace Confessions, when we pretend only to a liberty of acting and thinking according to our best light, without imposing upon our neighbours; because other people disesteem and run down all such composures.

These are a few of the extraordinary benefits which liberty, and a right of private judgment, owe to the endeavours of those that give out themselves to be the most zealous sticklers for them; these are a few of those uncommon heights of freedom to which they have elevated it by their discoveries; a freedom, at the bottom, to dissolve the sacred bonds of Christian societies, the unity of faith,—to jumble light and darkness, and make an inglorious composition of truth and error;—a liberty to impose, if not articles of faith, at least a disbelief and contempt of them upon others, and, under a painted mask of freedom, to dictate their own notions and schemes of an airy fantastical liberty to others, in as imperious a manner, and with as magisterial an authority, as those whom they so much exclaim against.

Every person in the least acquainted with books or men, will be soon sensible what numberless prejudices the greatest part labour under, and what confused notions they have of things; that a set of words are frequently used, and obstinately maintained, while very little is clearly understood by them; and that words and phrases of a very good intent and signification originally, have been wrested, and abused, and employed to cheat the populace, and inflame the passions of such as are generally more influenced by words than by things. And we shall readily own the justice of the observation which the author of the *Occasional Paper* makes—That religion, truth, church, Orthodoxy, &c., have been thus shamefully perverted, to serve the worst purposes of ambition, lust of power, and all kind of oppression, civil and religious; and perhaps others besides the Church of Rome may be chargeable with this.

But is there not ground enough to apply the same observation to a different purpose? Have not these favourite words of a party,—liberty, free-thinking, impartial inquiry, private judgment, &c., been prostituted to as mean and unworthy purposes, and in the mouths of some been perverted to as little, or as uncertain, or as dangerous, a signification?

Have they not been tools to promote atheism and infidelity, and a fair mask, under which hatred to God and goodness, and an apostasy from Christianity, have disguised themselves? Did they ever make a louder noise than in the mouths of Deists? and have not ignorant and vain infidels, when driven from all their strongholds, and attacked by the most clear and convincing arguments, screened themselves under the covert of those useful words, as much as ever the most bigoted zealots do by the help of *the church* or *orthodoxy*? Do not we know, that in the mouths and in the lives of many, *liberty* means an unrestrained licence, and a neglect of religion and virtue; and that the love of it is brought as an excuse for a cold unconcernedness about the doctrines of our blessed Saviour, and a disregard to truth and light? And have not the enemies of the Gospel, who had nothing else to say, eagerly laid hold of the opportunity, and cried up private judgment, free-thinking, &c., that by the noise thereof, they might drown the calmer voice of reason and argument?

Do not we see the writers on that side as fond of their own notions about Creeds and Confessions,—as obstinate in maintaining and urging them,—and puffed up with as disdainful sentiments of those who differ from them, as the most zealous devotees of orthodoxy? Do we not see that they are as impatient of contradiction as others; and, to apply the words of an author, who levelled them against another quarter, to our present purpose—as *warm* and *zealous* against Confessions and orthodoxy, and such as can be as *rude*, as *unmannerly*, and as *unchristian*, in their contentions about them, as their neighbours? Where in the world do writers treat their adversaries with so much contempt, and diffuse such an air of superiority, and a fond addictedness to their schemes, through the whole of their performances, as those who arrogate to themselves the name of *free-thinkers*? Nor will it be without ground, if we observe, that all our adversaries in this debate seem to incline to this project—that while all Confessions and Articles of Faith are overturned and condemned, this should nevertheless be established and enforced as an unalterable article of faith, and a constant creed, *That there should be no Confessions, or tests of orthodoxy.*

To conclude : The true way to maintain the inestimable blessings of liberty of conscience and private judgment, in matters of religion, is, to avoid every extreme, that either leads to tyranny, or to anarchy and confusion ; and it is *not* to dissolve liberty and freedom into licentiousness, to freeze it into a cold indifference about the doctrines of the Gospel, or blow it up into an airy phantom, that will break of itself, and is too thin and imaginary to be useful to any valuable purpose : which medium, we flatter ourselves, may in a great measure be obtained, by adhering to the principles of real liberty which have been laid down.

These reflections may possibly appear too severe ; and it was indeed with reluctance that we made them, since we always esteem that way of writing and disputing most, which is confined to a plain representation of the arguments and reasons of a cause, in their native strength and simplicity, without any mixture of satire or harsh treatment of an adversary. But in the present dispute, the reflections seemed to be just, and the cause to deserve them. It was only imitating a little their own way of writing ; and it seemed in some measure necessary, to give some notion of the unreasonableness of the accusations brought against us, and the little ground that the persons who exclaim loudest have to make them.

There remain only two things upon this head to be considered.

First, It may be alleged, That how confidently soever we disclaim persecution for conscience' sake, and an arbitrary imposition upon the understandings of mankind ; yet in fact we approve it, since we allow all Churches to depose their ministers, if they embrace opinions contrary to their public standards ; as a consequence of which, they are deprived of their stipends,—that is their bread, and the only means of their livelihood,—which seems to be a very great degree of persecution.

It were needless to deny, that a minister being thus deprived for departing from the established Confession, is laid open to very great inconveniences ; and the want of his stipend is an important loss to him. But we hope it will easily

appear, that there can be no ground to complain of the Church that turns him off; and that they do nothing in such a case but what they have an undisputed right to, and what is both reasonable and necessary, if we consider, that a man is not thereby deprived of any thing that he has a natural right to, or which he can claim as a member of civil society. The forming of a society for religious purposes, is, according to the principles already established, a voluntary act of those who compose it; and when, according to what they think the nature of the thing, and the commands of God, oblige them to, public teachers are instituted among them, the qualifications of the persons to be invested with that office, and the terms upon which they are to be admitted, and, as a consequence of this, are to enjoy the public maintenance which the Church has provided for her pastors, must be submitted to the joint determination of the body; and *as no man can intrude himself into an ecclesiastical office in that society contrary to their inclinations, and the rules established by them*, so none can pretend to the public salary annexed to it, but in a consistency therewith.

A person, therefore, that is not found sufficiently qualified, or does not think fit to comply with the necessary terms upon which this office and benefice are bestowed, can in no justice complain, though the society should either deny him them at first, or deprive him of them afterwards; because he had no claim to them, but what depended upon the voluntary grant of the Church, and must be regulated by its constitutions, which if he depart from, he evidently forfeits any title that he had to his stipend. He knows that the very design of the society in submitting to him as their minister, and making suitable provision as to his temporal concerns, was, that they might enjoy Gospel ordinances, and hear the Word preached, in a way agreeable to their consciences; and that they might have satisfaction as to one qualification absolutely necessary, his own soundness in that faith, they required a declaration of his assent to such articles as appeared to them requisite; and, therefore, if he depart from that doctrine, and so become incapable of promoting these ends, he has himself to blame for any disadvantage he may be exposed to, and can in no modesty or justice pretend

still to enjoy those benefits that were bestowed, not absolutely, but only upon conditions which are violated, and towards purposes which he can no wise promote. It might as well be alleged, that a conditional gift should take place, though the condition required entirely fail, and have no subsistence.

I acknowledge that when a man, in departing from the public standard upon what appears to him better information, acts and speaks agreeably to his conscience, and chooses rather to follow the light of his understanding than enjoy temporal advantages, he is a fit object both of compassion and esteem: and though he be in an error, his integrity and self-denial should meet with due regard, whatever sentiments we entertain of his knowledge. Nor is it to be doubted, but that a person who does so, and prefers truth and sincerity to any of the profits or allurements of this life, will be looked upon by God as a sufferer for righteousness' sake, and may expect an hundred-fold in the world to come. But then, whether this be the case with him, and he be animated by these heroic principles,—whether, in changing his opinion as to any article of an established Creed, he has embraced the truth, or if he has in reality abandoned it, and made apostasy from the faith,—must be left to the determination of God, who certainly knows it, and is the only judge who can be appealed to. Only this much seems to be evident, that other people, and particularly those who received him as their minister, upon condition of his adhering to, and teaching agreeably to the public Confession, ought to act agreeably to their own sentiments, and not to his; and may justly bestow their favours upon those who will promote what appears to them the cause of truth and righteousness, and not on those who are devoted to the interests of error or impurity.

So little reason is there to call the abstracting of the benefice from such a man persecution, that, on the contrary, the obliging them to continue it (which the principles of these pretended asserters of liberty lead to) were a very grievous oppression, and an arbitrary imposition. And it will soon appear how modest and reasonable a demand they make, if we consider, that it plainly amounts to this—that

a society which gave you a right to a stipend upon a certain condition, should be bound to continue the payment when the condition is dissolved on your part,—that the money devoted by them to the maintenance of persons whose business it is to administer to them sacred things according to their consciences, and contribute to the purity and power of the Christian doctrine, should be so far diverted from that use, as to be squandered away upon those whose opinions render them incapable of advancing these ends, and, which is still more absurd, who will naturally counteract and oppose them, by propagating principles directly contradictory to these sacred truths; and so the society shall be obliged to contribute to purposes which they believe not only useless, but extremely hurtful and disagreeable.

So that this objection brought against us is so far from being valid, that, on the contrary, did it take place, it would carry along with it a very grievous persecution, and a notorious piece of oppression. It were to deprive men of their natural rights; and, under a mask of liberty, to make them dispose of that towards the spreading of error or infidelity, which they inclined to devote to the advancement of pure and undefiled religion.

Every society is master of its own favours; it is highly reasonable that it should bestow them to the best ends, and upon those persons who appear fittest to promote them. This in religious matters is especially necessary; and it were extremely unjust and tyrannical to fancy, that they must act contrary to their own consciences, and in opposition to the interests which are dearest to their souls, in supporting the apostate priests of Baal, instead of the faithful servants of Jehovah;—I hope the severity of the comparison may be pardoned, since it is particularly levelled at nobody;—and the same reason will hold, in proportion, as to all those who, though it be in a lesser degree, depart from any truths which a Church, by making them a part of her Confession, shows she thinks momentous.

Did I therefore alter my notions as to articles of faith which I had once subscribed, and come to perceive the falsehood of them, I would think myself obliged to follow the dictates of my conscience; and it were mean and inglorious

to disguise my real sentiments, for fear of temporal losses and Church censures. I would endeavour, by all due means, to persuade the Church to which I belonged to change their faith also, and embrace what I thought the better cause: but if I were not able to undeceive them, and, after all, they remained as they were, it would be extremely foolish to fancy that they would act directly contrary to their principles, in continuing me their minister, and endowing me with that salary which they had allotted to a pastor that should teach them doctrines which I had found myself obliged to abandon. And it were absurd to imagine, that though *those who serve the altar should live by the altar*, yet I should live by an altar which I had abandoned—set up one in opposition to—and indeed endeavoured to overthrow.

It might be easily illustrated by innumerable instances, that a man may suffer temporal losses upon the account of a change in his opinions, and yet not have the smallest reason to complain of persecution or injustice. One example or two will be sufficient. When the corrupted philosophy of Aristotle prevailed in the world, a Professor of reputation for teaching, and who was therefore crowded with students, and reaped a plentiful income from them, would evidently be exposed to a very great loss, by changing his schemes, and forming new ones, either such as those of Descartes, or Sir Isaac Newton, in their stead, unless he had the influence to persuade others also to make the same alteration in their sentiments,—because, so long as the world continued in their former humour, the number of his scholars must constantly decay; and yet he could not with the smallest plausibility allege, that those scholars who deserted his lessons, that they might bestow their time and their money upon other masters, had done him an injury—since it was absolutely in their power to choose what philosophy they would have taught them, and what persons should enjoy the emoluments arising therefrom.

A zealous Protestant possesses a large estate, which he designs after his death should be settled upon a friend of the same principles with himself, and who, he has reason to hope, would employ his fortune and interest for encouraging and advancing the religion which was so dear to him; that friend, *in the mean time*, changes his opinions, and apostatizes to

Popery: would there be the smallest colour of hardship in the other's altering, upon such an event, the destination he would otherwise have made of his estate, and disposing it to one that he valued more, and upon whom he thinks it will be incomparably better bestowed? Could he be charged with persecution in such a case, though the other in following the dictates of his conscience, really suffered as great a loss as the minister who thereby should forfeit the public stipend? And the reason is plain: every man, and each society, are judges of what depends upon themselves; and in disposing of any advantages and emoluments to be enjoyed amongst them, they must follow their own light—not ours, who differ from them, though we may fancy ourselves righter and wiser than they.

To conclude: Since the emoluments and salaries provided by any Church are dedicated by it to what they think the interest of pure religion, and are not simply bestowed upon persons, but annexed to offices under certain limitations and rules, and for which some necessary qualifications are required, of which soundness in the faith is one,—it seems evident, that the benefice must follow the office, and should be reasonably applied to those ends for which it was originally intended; and therefore, whenever any, whether by his faith or practice, becomes unqualified for that office, and the purposes of it, he must immediately lose all title to the emoluments annexed to it, and they must be bestowed on those who are thought fit to execute the charge. With so little reason is our Church, or any other, loaded with the guilt of persecution on this occasion, that our practice herein is founded upon the natural right of every person and society—upon a power over our own property and our own consciences; and therefore, by defending it, we maintain not our particular cause, but the common liberties of mankind, and the fundamental maxims of all government and order. For we pretend to no authority but what we allow to our neighbours in a like case, and shall always be ready to grant, that they may act in a consistency with their own principles, as well as we with ours; and we shall afterwards have occasion to prove, that true religion can never suffer any damage by this principle, and that the contrary was never pretended to by the

Apostles, or by the primitive professors of the purest Christianity.

In the *second* place, There is another argument whence, as it is insinuated, it appears, that those who adhere to Confessions of Faith, and think that an assent to them may be required of others, are justly chargeable with persecution; which objection we shall give in the words of its author:—“This humour, (says the author of the *Occasional Paper*) of creed-making and creed-imposing, is one of the most grievous instances of persecution, and the grand source of every other kind of it. If it be only their good opinion of us that our fellow-Christians suspend upon non-assent to their Confessions of Faith, they in a very inhuman and unchristian way persecute us. It is in itself barbarous (says Mr Marvel) for these faith-stretchers, whosoever they be, to put men’s consciences upon the torture, to rack them to the length of their notions.”

By what we have already discoursed, we hope that we have vindicated ourselves from the charge of imposition, and usurping an arbitrary authority over the consciences of others, whose faith is no ways subjected to our determinations; and that we are cleared from the imputation of any unjust methods of violence and oppression, in order to propagate our opinions, and force an assent to the established Creed; and therefore it will be needless to illustrate this head any further. And, we doubt not, there will be found as little moment in the other kind of persecution, which the enemies to Confessions charge upon those who maintain them,—namely, their withdrawing or suspending their good opinion of those who differ from them, which is thought a great hardship, and a just ground for loud complaints.

He must have little of the spirit of Christianity, and the temper of its blessed Author, who does not put the highest value upon those lovely graces of our religion—an extensive charity, a mutual forbearance, an universal benevolence to our fellow-creatures or our fellow-Christians, and a sincere inclination to live in peace, and cultivate union and friendship with them. We shall heartily fall in with all that the *other side* can say of their excellency, and concur in every

→ thing that may recommend them to the minds and lives of men, give steadier and brighter views of their incomparable beauty, and make deeper impressions of their indispensable necessity. Nor is it to be doubted that all these virtues should subsist, even amongst those who may not be so happy as to agree in their sentiments about every article of faith and mode of worship. Nor should differences in opinion, especially about lesser matters, extinguish love, or dissolve the bonds of charity; but that noble principle should have a governing power over all our passions, and run through the whole train of our conversation; and, according to the apostolical rule, *Whereunto we have attained, we ought all to walk by the same rule*, and unite in affectionate endeavours to promote the interests of religion, and proclaim the glory of our common Saviour.

That man also may be counted of a narrow and inhuman spirit, and blown up with prejudices and vanity, who is so blind or conceited as to confine virtue and merit to his own party, and his particular way of thinking. A man may be a very good man, and excel us in many valuable qualities, though even in religious matters he may follow a different way from us; and we should always be ready to esteem and applaud learning, wisdom, or goodness and probity, wherever we find them, though they should be the ornaments sometimes of our adversaries. Meekness, and humility, and generosity,—a fervent love to God and our brethren,—heavenly affections, and a contempt of this world,—or any other noble quality, should not be overlooked, nor less beloved and admired, because they may be joined with a mistaken notion, and the person beautified with them may not perceive every thing in our light; and then a particular regard should be paid to the moral qualities of a man, and to practical goodness, when we measure out our esteem and affection.

As we should not be wanting in any of these respects to such as differ from us, and may not come up in every thing to our sentiments; so we should far less pretend to judge of their hearts, and the sincerity of their professions, or the impartiality of their inquiries,—to censure them rashly, or misrepresent their opinions,—to ascribe by-ends to them,

and load them with reproaches,—or attribute heresies and absurdities to them which we have no ground for but our own suspicions and prejudices. Nor ought we precipitately to damn and anathematize people upon every difference with us, and, aspiring to the throne and authority of God, pass sentence upon them beforehand, and pronounce their eternal doom. This were indeed to forget our station, and usurp the place of our Master. *Judge not, lest ye be judged*, should, in such cases, still sound in our ears; and we ought to be mindful of our folly and weakness in not hearkening to it, and that God may absolve whom we so ignorantly reprobate. All these things we are ready to own, and endeavour to practise; and we hope there is no reason for charging a contradiction to them upon our Church or its Articles. And it is with pleasure we observe, that the Westminster Confession, which we embrace, is free from damnatory clauses; nor is it ever required of us to pronounce anathemas upon others.

But if this will not satisfy, and it be demanded that differences in opinion, however momentous, should not in the least influence our affection and esteem,—that no alteration should happen in our judgment of a person, and our regard to him, upon his abandoning the Confession embraced by us,—and that one who departs from the doctrine of the Gospel, and *makes shipwreck of his faith*, at least as appears to us, should yet claim the same share in our good opinion of him as if he had remained steadfast in the belief of the truth: I say, if this be the case, it is hoped we shall be excused to think it a very absurd and imperious demand, directly contrary to the nature of things, and a favour absolutely impossible for us to grant; and that the charging us with persecution because we refuse it, is indeed to be guilty of that very crime wherewith they load their neighbours.

It is an universally acknowledged maxim, that likeness begets esteem and love,—and that agreement of temper and understanding cements affections, and animates them. It must be therefore hard to imagine, how a conformity of sentiments, especially in religious matters, which are of the last importance, and in which consists the noblest tie of union, should fail to have an influence of this kind, which a *disagreement* in them, and indifference about them, can never

gain; and if I have a value for the doctrine of Christianity, I cannot conceive how I can fail to esteem the purity of it a very commendable quality in everybody who has it; and that the disbelief of any part of it is an imperfection which he would be the better if he wanted. If I be persuaded of the truth of any article of a Confession, I must necessarily think the man who opposes it chargeable with an error; and therefore I can never have so good an opinion of his faith, as if he still adhered to it, though on other accounts I ~~may~~ value his person, and esteem him for qualities that are more amiable than another man's orthodoxy in these particulars; for eminent advances in practical religion, and a distinguished lustre of Christian virtues, will balance a great many mistakes, and, to use the scriptural phrase, *will cover a multitude of sins*.

An error of any kind must, notwithstanding, be always a blemish; and the greater and more momentous it be, the stain of it becomes the deeper and more deformed; and consequently, the difference betwixt the person who is poisoned with it, and him who embraces the opposite truth, is proportionably increased; and this becomes remarkably greater, when the doctrine denied is of universal consequence with respect to the general scheme and design of Christianity, or has a diffusive influence upon practice. And therefore, if two persons were in all other respects equal, I could not fail to esteem him most whose faith was purest, and who, according to my poor judgment, regulated his belief the most exactly according to the Holy Scriptures; and the difference betwixt the regard and affection I had for the one and the other, would depend on the difference betwixt their orthodoxy (for there is no reason to be ashamed of or clamoured out of the word). Nor could I give an equal share of my good opinion to both, more than I could entertain the same value for darkness as for light, or perceive as shining a beauty in error as in truth, and esteem him as wise and happy who is overclouded with the one as if he were enlightened by the other. As the error swells, and becomes more important, so must my good opinion of the person who maintains it suffer an alteration till it arrive at heresy;—and then I cannot see how it is in my power not to think him an heretic;—and

then it becomes impossible for me to entertain communion with him as a Christian; because I believe his notions inconsistent with that pure religion, and that he has departed from the faith of the Gospel.

And to pretend that our affection and good opinion should not at all be influenced by these considerations, were not to show an extensive *charity to our brethren*, but a *cold unconcernedness about truth*, and an indifference whether the light from heaven, or the clouds and darkness of another place, should prevail in the world. Such a temper would seem to argue, not an uncommon fervency of affection to our fellow-creatures, nor a modesty and humility of mind that could bear contradiction, and allow every man to think as seems best to himself, but rather a faintness of love to our God and Saviour, and a lukewarmness with respect to the honour of Divine Revelation,—little thoughts of the excellency of truth,—and a wavering inconstancy of faith that had nothing deep rooted,—and a contempt or neglect of these Divine exhortations, that we should “continue in the faith” ourselves, and “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel;” that we “should earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints;” that “a man who is an heretic, should, after the first and second admonitions, be rejected;” that we are to “mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, and avoid them;” to “shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness; and their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.” Which must hold the same with respect to all those who corrupt any other article of equal importance; so that “if an angel from heaven,” and much more any man, “should preach any other gospel to us than that we have received, he must be accursed.” We shall only illustrate what might be further said upon this subject by one instance.

If we should see one who had formerly a very uncommon share in our esteem and affection, and whom we valued on *account of his great abilities, and eminent services to the*

cause of religion, falling backwards, and endeavouring to destroy that faith which it was thought he once preached, and to undermine the foundations of Christianity, perhaps in so essential and important an article as that of the adorable Trinity, and the divinity of our blessed Saviour, which diffuses itself through the whole of our religion, and is the life and soul of it, without which it could have no subsistence;—if we perceive him attempting to rob our Redeemer of his glory and dignity, and degrade him into the rank and dependence of a creature, however high a place he assign him among finite beings, and howsoever great superiority over them be attributed Him;—if we see him contradict the whole strain of the Gospel, in so plain, as well as incomparably momentous questions, as,—Whether the Saviour whom we worship and believe in, be finite or infinite, God or a creature?—Whether the submission, faith, love, dependence, gratitude, and worship, due to Him, be such as should be paid to the infinitely perfect and sovereign God?—Whether they should be the highest governing passions within us, performed *with all our soul, heart, and strength*; or if they ought to be proportioned to the inferior nature and excellency of a metaphorical, dependent, finite Deity?—Whether, as to these great objects of our confidence and joy, it be the precious blood of God that was shed for our sins?—If the satisfaction made to Divine justice, and the everlasting righteousness brought in by the Messiah, were the work of God, or of a creature?—and, consequently, what kind and degree of admiration, esteem, faith, and reliance, we should have upon them?—and how the whole of our actings towards them should be regulated?

If there be a disagreement amongst us in questions bewixt the different sides of which, and the consequences of them, there is an absolute inconsistency, and infinite disproportion; and if we find him chargeable with an error, or call it an opinion, of this kind—with whatever fair colourings it be varnished, though it be supported by ingenious subtleties, and cover itself by a heap of distinctions, and plausible expressions, which may impose upon an unwary mind—we can never help looking upon such a man as one that has apostatised from Christianity, and made shipwreck of the

faith. Let us study never so much moderation and charity, except we stifle the light of our understandings, contradict the dictates of conscience, and forget the honour of our Redeemer and the doctrine of his Gospel, can we look upon such principles with an indifferent eye—or join in religious worship with those from whom we differ so extremely about the very object of it—or maintain with them the communion of saints, and pay that warm regard and affection which should animate with a mutual pleasure and love all the members of Christ's body, to such as we are persuaded have ceased to hold the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands hath nourishment ministered to it, and is knit together—such as have renounced the belief, while they pretend to the name of Christians, and have themselves broken the unity of faith? Others, perhaps, who believe it themselves, may yet not esteem this article of such vast consequence, and they may govern their own conduct according to that opinion; but we would fain know how such as think vastly otherwise, and are persuaded that it intimately affects the vitals of Christianity, can possibly fail to judge, that the person who denies and impugns it has deserted from the armies of Israel, and gone over to the camp of the enemy; and that, so long as he continues that way, he must in some measure be ranked with those spoken of, “who should privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them.”

It is readily acknowledged, that in such a case we ought to lament the loss of a fellow-Christian, sincerely pity his deluded mind, and maintain a fervent love to his immortal soul; which should put us upon every method whereby we may contribute to his recovery, and convince him of his error. Nor should we put off the bowels of humanity, but remember still, that he is a man as we are, and that we also are in the body, liable to the same mistakes and delusions; we should do nothing that may harden him in his error, and needlessly fret his spirit, or inflame his passions; but, avoiding “bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, with all malice,” we ought to study the apostle's injunction to Timothy, to “be gentle unto all men, and patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose them-

selves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." But then the endearing bond of union which subsists amongst true Christians, is unavoidably dissolved by his apostacy; we can no more entertain the same esteem for him as formerly, nor pay him that peculiar affection and regard which are due to the household of faith, and take their rise from that Divine relation of *one faith, one hope, one baptism*.

Nor can it be justly alleged, that by forming these sentiments of our neighbour, and acting agreeably to them, we *condemn another man's servant*, and break our Saviour's precept, *Judge not, lest ye be judged*; since it is certain, that a man who behaves with caution and wisdom, must not bestow his good opinion, affection, or Christian fellowship, upon persons indifferently; but should examine, how far any are fit objects of them, and must be allowed so far to determine concerning others as is necessary to govern his own conduct. A good opinion of a man is not really at the command of our inclinations, as deceitful expressions of flattery are, but must be determined by our conscience and understanding; and of all things in the world, our esteem and love seem to be most our property, and least under the power of others: and yet those loud asserters of the cause of liberty would, under the protection of freedom itself, by the former objection, have emptied our purses, and imposed an arbitrary tax upon us;—and by this one they would force us to value them, though we cannot perceive those qualities which merit it, and shut our eyes against their blemishes and errors; and they would tear from us that esteem and affection which must ever proceed from a free choice, and a rational conviction. And if we oppose this violence done to our understandings, we must be traduced as persecutors; a conduct which has a near resemblance to another party, who constantly complain of oppression, and give out, that their rights are endangered, whenever they are hindered to tyrannize over their neighbours.

(2.) The second great objection against Confessions is founded upon the absolute perfection and incomparable ex-

cellency of the Holy Scriptures; whence it seems plainly to follow, that they are sufficient to all the purposes of religion; and since they are both so complete that they need no addition, and so evident that they need no interpretation, however important and necessary any doctrines be in themselves, it cannot be necessary to determine any thing concerning them that the Scriptures have not determined, or to decide them by any other explications than the Word of God has given of them. And upon this occasion the author of the *Occasional Paper* tells us, that the contrary practice "is not only without warrant from Scripture, but is likewise the most signal affront, and the most injurious reflection, that can possibly be cast on these holy writings. It is denying their perfection; it is saying, all necessary truth is not contained in them, or at least not in so good and proper expressions as it ought to be,—the phrases are more exceptionable, and more liable to be wrested or mistaken, than some of our own;—and thus it can never be consistent with the honour that is due to Christ as a prophet. It looks as though we apprehended we knew the Father, his nature, mind, and will, better than the Son did; or at least could clothe out as perfect notions of things, in better, and wiser, and sounder words, than He was either able or careful to make use of."

By the general principles laid down in the beginning, and what has been said in answer to the former objection, we hope this also is in a great measure removed; since it appears, that we build all the authority with which we invest Confessions upon foundations which are perfectly consistent with the principles of the Reformation, and the absolute perfection and sufficient plainness of the Holy Scriptures in all things necessary to salvation, without the addition of human tradition, or human explications; since we in no sense make our Confession a rule, in conformity to which the Scriptures ought to be measured and understood by the people; nor a proper standard of truth and falsehood in matters of religion, which can alone be determined by the Holy Scriptures. And therefore, whatever is adduced by any writer to heighten the excellency of Divine Revelation, and to establish its sufficiency, fulness, and evidence, shall not only pass without contradiction, but be received by us with pleasure and

approbation, and meet with the applause due to so noble and useful a performance.

So that the precise thing to be considered is, Whether Creeds may be drawn up in other words and phrases than those precise ones which are to be found in Scripture—not as rules of faith, but as declarations of our own sentiments, and means of discovering the opinion of others concerning religious controversies?

And because the objection is plausible—as representing Confessions as injurious to the honour and dignity of the sacred writings—the glory of which will be ever dear to all who value our religion,—and since the least approaches to any thing that may detract from their excellency, or give low and unworthy ideas of that infallible rule of faith, may justly startle every pious mind, and would affect us with the most sensible concern, if we suspected that our principles or practice had a tendency that way—it will not be improper to examine what is advanced by our adversaries: and therefore we shall, by some considerations, endeavour to show, that it is reasonable and necessary, for any Church that is resolved to attain a just satisfaction concerning the orthodoxy of her public teachers, and for any person or society who design to make an open declaration of their own faith, to express the doctrines of Christianity in other words and phrases than those of the sacred writings,—that they may justly expect more of ecclesiastical officers than an acknowledgment of their belief of the doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures, or any particular passage thereof,—that, for these ends, Creeds and Confessions of human composure may be lawfully framed and subscribed, without the smallest affront to the Holy Scriptures, or the least hazard to their Divine glory, and absolute perfection and sufficiency,—and that the confining persons or Churches, in their articles and determinations of faith, to the precise words of Scripture, is an invasion upon the liberties of Christians, dangerous to the purity of Christianity, and exposed to many inconveniences and absurdities.

It cannot be disputed by any who submit to the Apostle's authority, that as there are many avowed infidels, who pay no regard to the sacred writings, so there are persons of a

different complexion, who, though they pretend to own them, yet being *unlearned and unstable, wrest all the Scriptures unto their own destruction*. Of this there are evident proofs in every age. Cunning and bold heretics have the confidence to profess the highest deference to Divine Revelation, to submit to and believe all the parts of it; and yet they impose such glosses upon them as entirely destroy the meaning of the inspired penmen—they distinguish away their sense; and thus, while they keep to the words, they do not adhere to one doctrine of religion, but clothe their infidelity with a false skin of truth, while they have as little claim thereby to the Christian name, as the ass with the lion's skin had to the courage or generosity of that noble creature.

Take a particular text, two persons shall subscribe it, and yet contradict one another in their opinion about that very article, and both of them shall fancy the passage applicable to their purpose. A Socinian, without reluctance, will assent to any phrases by which the divinity of Christ is asserted in the holy oracles; but he perverts the sense of them, and explains all the high titles ascribed to him—that of God itself—so that in his mouth it shall signify a dependent creature. And, in the same manner, an Arminian and a Calvinist differ widely about innumerable passages of Paul's writings; and when both should subscribe the words and phrases of the inspired writer, they would mean different things, and believe irreconcilable doctrines. Whence it seems evidently to follow, that a person's owning his belief of these Scriptures, and assenting to these phrases, does not let me further into his opinions than I was before, and it is not the least proof of the doctrine which he believes, nor can distinguish to me a Socinian from one who owns the deity of Christ,—an open enemy to our blessed Saviour, from his faithful subject,—in a word, a believer from an infidel.

Since, therefore, the phrases of the inspired writers have been so mightily perverted, and wire-drawn from their true sense, at least by one of the parties; since people ascribe to them different meanings, and when they use them, express by them very distinct notions, and so, as they are understood by mankind, they have become of an ambiguous and inde-

terminate signification; it seems evident, that these words and phrases are not at all sufficient and clear expressions of a person's faith,—that thereby there can be no security attained as to his belief of the most essential articles of Christianity; nor can a man publish his own faith to the world, and bear witness to the truth by those phrases, nor distinguish himself from the most abandoned heretic. A society which is persuaded that Socinianism is inconsistent with Christianity, were it about to judge of the qualifications of a person to whose ministry it were to submit itself, could not, by the help of these tests, discover whether he were a heathen or a Christian; all which appear to be very glaring absurdities. From which it seems to follow, almost with the evidence of the demonstration, that if these things are at all necessary or allowable, and if they ought on any occasion to be performed, we must do it by the help of other words and phrases than those of the Bible,—phrases that are adjusted to the different circumstances of learning and controversy, of men and places,—phrases that have a determinate meaning, and by which it may be in some measure known what is professed and believed.

To say, therefore, that no Confessions or declarations of faith should be drawn up in other than Scripture expressions, is to affirm, that we must be indifferent whether a man with whom we go to the house of God, and join in Church communion, be a Christian, or not; that is, whether he believe the fundamental doctrines of our religion, or only usurp the name;—that we must make such a blind and injudicious choice of ministers, which is a thing of vast moment to a man that values his soul, as to be so ignorant of his qualifications, that there is a perfect uncertainty with us, whether he believes that doctrine himself which we design he should teach us, and whether he be a real enemy to that faith for the defence of which he is set up.

Hence also it follows, that Christians should never confess their Master, or his religion, before men who hate and oppose him, and should never obey the Apostle's injunction, 1 Pet. iii. 15, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." For I would know how in the world,

for example, I can give a testimony to the faith of the Gospel in a declining age, and, without being ashamed of it, profess my unalterable love and steady adherence to truth, and my disapprobation and hatred of all those heresies which at any time prevail over the purity of doctrine, by speaking and owning only what these very heretics do, and subscribing a proposition which every Socinian will sign at the same moment with me? If I do not explain what I mean by a phrase which is evidently understood in so different a manner—if I do not manifest that I mean something that the Socinian does not—what small degree of satisfaction can thereby be given to any man concerning my belief? Will he know more than he did before of the hope that is in me, or be able to tell what I am, and what my faith is? And, therefore, by such a subscription I really do nothing, and can gain no possible end, but to conceal my real sentiments under a disguise of doubtful words, and impose upon the credulity of my thoughtless neighbours.

It will not in the least remedy this, to allege the perfection of the Scriptures, and the clearness and perspicuity of the phrases used by the Holy Ghost, and to infer thence, that they alone must be sufficient for all these ends; because, as it is hoped that the gross fallacy of this argument will appear afterwards, so it seems enough for the present, that this reasoning is a *protestation against fact*; it is an airy speculation concerning schemes which we allege should obtain, and affirm would be sufficient for such purposes, when it is plain, that in fact the case is quite otherwise; and that the use of these phrases does not at all let me into the knowledge of a man's principles of the highest moment in religion; and therefore, with whatever ornaments such a scheme for regulating declarations of faith may be busked up, and how specious and gay soever it may appear, it can only exist in a strong imagination, but will never satisfy any man's conscience, or enlighten his understanding; and the hypothesis must be false, because we see it fail in experience.

So that this opinion, espoused by many with so much zeal, and supported with such vehemence, instead of doing honour to the Scriptures, and being of advantage to the truth, seems *indeed* admirably calculated to let in all manner of errors

and corruptions to the Church, and break down all the fences by which they may be kept out. It affords a noble covert, under which the grossest heretics may shelter themselves, and a disguise by which they may pervert unwary souls; nor could a better-contrived form of truth and godliness have been wished for by those deceivers of old, *which crept into houses, and led captive silly women*. It tends to defile and confound all religious societies, and destroy the very being of Church communion, the foundation of which is laid in *one faith, one hope, one baptism*; and to compose a monstrous body of Arians, Socinians, Gnostics, Antinomians, Pelagians, Idolaters (for so we may call the Papists), Adamites, Enthusiastics, &c., joined with such as are directly opposite to all these,—all of whom blended together are to make up one worshipping assembly, that shall eat off the same altar, and be edified by the same preacher; which is in effect to jumble together light and darkness, and make a composition betwixt God and Belial—to overcloud the glory, and stain the purity, of a society that ought to be *a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, called out of darkness unto light*; and, in a word, it is to imitate the Jews, in turning the *temple of God into a den of thieves*. These seem to be a few of the native consequences of the principle which we oppose; though we are far from insinuating, that they are the design or apprehension of all those who maintain it.

It is true, it may be alleged that Creeds expressed in other phrases, of our own contrivance, after all the care that can be taken, are liable to the same inconveniences,—that others may understand them in a different sense from what we do,—and that heretics may please themselves with distinctions and subtleties, by the help of which they will fancy they can subscribe these human composures in a consistency with their own opinions. All this is readily acknowledged;—that there is no absolute security against error, trick, and deceit, amongst men; and that, after all our endeavours, we may be imposed upon. But the consequence of this should be, to engage us to the greater caution to follow the methods which seem least liable to mistake, and not to trust to a declaration which we know is fallacious.

We are already assured, that in the mouths of different persons the phrases of Scripture are ambiguous, and differently understood. An Unitarian thinks the plainest passage where the divinity of our Saviour is asserted, may be explained so as to mean the quite contrary, and he tells us that he interprets it that way. If, after this, a person's using these phrases were received as a satisfying declaration of his faith, we would be guilty of deceiving ourselves, and might be charged with the weakest credulity. But whatever may possibly happen, yet I have no such ground to suspect, that the like has actually obtained with respect to Confessions of Faith, or that persons in the like manner misunderstand them, and apply the words to contradictory meanings;—on the contrary, I perceive, that heretics refuse to subscribe them, because they think them contradictory to their notions, and cannot so easily please themselves with an evasive distinction; and therefore I see, that in so far they gain their end: and till there appear reason to believe the contrary, what ground is there to mistrust a person of unblemished reputation, or to suspect that he does not understand the words of a Confession in the plain common sense, and so as he knows that Church and society where he is understands them?

In the next place, there seems to be a great deal of superstition in the opinion of those gentlemen who would be thought freest from that temper, and a great hazard of the people's being possessed thereby with a very dangerous turn of superstitious thought. Words are in themselves nothing,—they have no natural connection with things, and are only arbitrary, not necessary, signs of our thoughts,—they derive all their significance from use and custom; nor are any set of words and phrases, even those of the Holy Scriptures themselves, any way of more value than others, nor worthy of more regard, if we abstract from the sense of them, and the doctrines which are thereby revealed: so that the whole being and design of words depend wholly upon the meaning which the speaker or writer assigns them. In so far, therefore, as any language is unknown, or any words of a known language are of an indeterminate signification, they must be in *so far* absolutely useless; and the person who uses them, without a clear explication, had just as good have said nothing.

If, therefore, any Scripture phrase be understood by the world so as to mean different things, if the person who speaks in these terms refuses to inform me in which sense he takes them, he might as well speak Chinese, and very plainly mocks me, while he calls that a declaration of his faith: and when one pretends to satisfy me, by assenting to a place where Christ is called God, and yet will not instruct me what he means by the word *God*,—whether what is usually understood by that word when applied to the Father, or only a metaphorical deity, as the Socinians take it; in such a case, might he not as well, instead of the word *God*, put down an Indian one, since he would with equal clearness express his thoughts in both cases? To make, then, such a use of the phrases of the Holy Oracles sufficient, or at all allowable, is so far from consulting their glory, that, on the contrary, it is turning them into charms and amulets: and it may be as reasonably affirmed, that a few of these words written on a piece of paper should cure a man of diseases, as that, by the help of them, when the meaning of the person is indeterminate, he can be cleared from the suspicion of heresy.

Methinks that then only a regard is paid to Divine Revelation, when the truths published by it are believed, and the words of it are understood the same way that they were designed by the Holy Ghost; without which an assent to them is to no purpose, nor can be called an assent to the Holy Scriptures. When two persons, a Socinian and a Calvinist, subscribe a passage of the Sacred Oracles, by which they really design to testify their belief of contradictory propositions, while they agree in the words, I would fain know if both of them may be said to *believe and receive* that Scripture?—if one of them, who imposes such a sense upon the words, as, instead of a truth, to mean by them the very error condemned by the Holy Ghost, does, by his subscription, in the least testify his belief of Christianity, or any of its doctrines?—and if these words, when they have no determinate meaning affixed to them, can to any valuable purpose be reckoned the words of the Holy Ghost, or Scripture expressions?—or do not they rather become absolutely insignificant, and nothing but a dead letter? These phrases can

then no more be accounted Divine Revelation, or claim any honour and regard, than a body without a spirit can be accounted a man, or a skin stuffed up with straw can be looked upon as an animal: and to look upon the assenting to these phrases as a sufficient declaration of a man's faith, a receiving of the Scriptures, or a confessing of Christ and his Gospel, seems to be grossly superstitious, and must be built upon the same foundations with the Popish doctrine of *opus operatum*. It is attributing I know not what magical virtue to certain sounds and combinations of letters, without a fixed meaning, as if they could demonstrate a man a Christian, or an orthodox believer, whenever they were pronounced or subscribed; and, consequently, by turning scriptural phrases into a kind of charms and spells, it is the highest injury, and the most insolent contempt that can be poured out upon them, and a reviving of a worse than the ancient Pharisaism, by which so mighty a regard was pretended to the letter of that law the spirit whereof they had destroyed.

Nor can it be alleged, in answer to this, that though these two subscribers of a Scripture phrase which they refuse to explain, may really design to give their assent by the same deed to contradictory propositions, yet each of them may have a distinct apprehension of his own meaning, and a determinate notion of that which he takes to be the intention of the inspired penman, which is enough to free them from the charge of using these Scripture words as a charm, or imagining that sounds, without a signification, are possessed of any real value or efficacy. For this does not in the least touch the difficulty. A man, according to the Apostle's rule, may have faith to himself; but when he pretends to make a declaration of his faith, he must calculate it for his neighbours, and make it so that I may understand his meaning, else it entirely loses its end. Words are not intended to represent a man's thoughts to himself: in such a case he might modulate his voice what way he pleased, and when he pronounced the most barbarous and unknown sounds, be thinking on any subject he fancied most.

But words are evidently the expressions of our thoughts to others; and in the present case they are means whereby *another may be informed concerning my faith; and conse-*

quently they must be plain and determinate in their signification: which I am sure a phrase taken by the subscribers in very different senses can never be, unless they fix upon the sense in which they understand them: and if this be denied, the person as really speaks in an unknown tongue to me as if he used Malabarick words. The man who spoke with tongues, mentioned by the apostle, 1 Cor. xiv., no doubt understood what he meant, and might edify himself thereby: but then it was ridiculous for such a speaker to talk to others; for he truly *spake not unto men, but unto God; for no man understandeth him, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.* And if the apostle thought that such speakers would be accounted mad, by the unlearned and unbeliever who should come in among them, what thoughts must he have entertained of those who would pretend to confess their faith, and give an account of their doctrine to others, in an unknown tongue, or, which is the same thing, in phrases which they knew had double senses affixed to them by the world, without determining the sense which they took them in? Surely that they were possessed with a more extravagant fancy than the others.

The Papists, I doubt not, will reckon themselves under unusual obligations to these gentlemen: for never could any thing be invented more plausible to recommend prayers in an unknown tongue, than the forming Creeds in the same language,—indeed the first seems to be a much fairer practice. Prayers may be understood by the priest, who puts them up in the name of the congregation; and they are immediately addressed to God, who certainly understands them equally in all languages; and if the *opus operatum* were of any efficacy, such prayers would be very serviceable. But public Confessions of one's faith are designed for others, and directed immediately to the people; and therefore, if they be drawn up in ambiguous words,—that is, words which it is doubtful what the speaker means by them,—they are in a peculiar measure ridiculous.

When we profess the truths of the Gospel—*give a reason of our hope to one that asks us*—and pretend to satisfy others about a matter of so great importance, if in any case, we should then use the greatest clearness of expression and

openness of mind; and what the apostle with so much plainness and importunity writes to the Corinthians concerning them that prophesied, seems to hold with an uncommon force in the present question, and to be extremely applicable to our purpose,—1 Cor. xiv., “He that prophesieth, speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” “And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.” “Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.” I am sure it would look like a more precise regard to the Scriptures, and every way as satisfactory, to confine one’s self to the original, and when making a confession of his faith to an ordinary congregation, to speak Greek, as to pronounce or subscribe the phrases of an English translation, which have very contradictory meanings imposed upon them, while he refuses to give any account of his sense of them.

It will be acknowledged by all sides, that there is, or ought to be, such a thing as unity of faith among Christians,—that they may join together in the profession of the same common religion,—and that their publishing declarations of faith, or Creeds of any kind, is designed to testify their agreement and communion therein. Now I would fain know, when a Socinian and a Calvinist subscribe the same passage of the Holy Oracles, what it is which is testified thereby? Not an agreement in the belief of any doctrine,—not the remotest conformity of sentiments,—for it is plain in these things they differ widely; but an agreement in words without a meaning,—an union in empty sounds. And surely to look upon this as a foundation of Christian communion, and the only, or the proper, way whereby a Church can declare its belief, is the most extravagant superstition, and a converting the words of the inspired writers into so many charms, *and forming them into machines of legerdemain*, by the help

of which truth and error may be represented in the same likeness.

The only way to evade these absurdities which occurs to us, is to allege, that they are as far as we from designing to use words of an uncertain meaning; and that though they think, that the doctrines of the Gospel should be expressed only in the words of the Holy Ghost, yet they are willing to explain what they mean by these words, and what they take to be the true scriptural sense of them. But if they will do this, they yield the whole question, and we are perfectly agreed; for to subscribe a passage of Scripture taken in such a particular sense, is the same thing with subscribing those phrases by which we determine our sense of that Scripture, or with making them a part of our Creed,—which is all that is pleaded by us.

In reality, it is the doctrines, and not the words, that must only be meant by the Holy Scriptures, when we are commanded to receive them, and submit to them. It is they only that can claim our highest esteem, and the most sacred regard to their honour; it is the mind and sense of the Holy Ghost, delivered to us by the apostles and prophets, which can alone be called Divine Revelation, and respected as the perfect rule of our faith and manners, and not empty phrases and combinations of letters. And consequently, wherever these doctrines are taught and professed in their purity, in whatever terms they be expressed, the Holy Scriptures are revered, and made the standard of faith; and where these doctrines are denied, and contradictory opinions embraced, there in so far the Bible is rejected, and another rule of faith is set up, and valued more than Divine Revelation; though, in the meantime, all the phrases of the Holy Scripture, and they only, should be used by that person, under a pretence of a more strict adherence and submission to the Holy Oracles.

In vain do such honour God, seeing, by the false or ambiguous sense they have affixed to the words of Scripture, they have made the commandments and the doctrines of the Bible,—that is, the whole of its design, every thing that has life and spirit in it,—of none effect. Well may such be ranked with the hypocrites, *who honour God with their lips, while their hearts are far from him.*

All the articles, then, which any Church, and particularly ours, place in their Confessions, are, or ought to be, the very doctrines of Christianity revealed in the Holy Scriptures; and we hope, with us, that they are the things themselves, though not the precise words whereby they are expressed; nor do we ever pretend to give any new decisions concerning the truths of religion but what the Bible has given, or to add any explications or restrictions of the Gospel Revelation but what the Word of God itself has given. When therefore, for example, we in our Confession declare our belief of the Trinity, in such plain and determinate words as to make it evident we believe that the Son of God, our Saviour, and the Holy Spirit, are by nature GOD, the supreme infinite Maker of the world, one GOD with the FATHER, and not a metaphorical and dependent god, we assert the precise same doctrine, without addition or alteration, which is revealed in a great many passages of Scripture. This is the thing contained in these texts; and if that doctrine be abstracted from, or disbelieved, as it is by Socinians and Arians, the adhering to these texts is not an adhering to the Scriptures, but only to a dead letter,—to words without the things signified by them.

So that we perfectly agree with the author of the *Occasional Paper*—"That however important or necessary these doctrines be in themselves, yet it cannot be necessary to determine any thing concerning them that the Scriptures have not determined, or to decide them by any other explications than the Word of God has given of them." Nor are we chargeable with any of the bad consequences which he alleges follow the denial of that principle: for the doctrine taught in our Confession is not another thing, but the self-same thing determined by the Scriptures concerning the deity of the Son of God; that is, we think so. And we have essayed to prove already, that every person, and each society, has a right to make all the use that is made of our Confession; and that in what relates to it, they must follow the light of their own consciences, and act according as things appear to them.

But we proceed to some other inconveniences and absurd-

dities which seem to attend the opinion of those gentlemen who maintain, that no words or phrases but those exactly which occur in the Sacred Writings, are to be made use of in Confessions or Declarations of Faith.

According to this principle, there can be no expositions made of the Scriptures to the people by their ministers, nor any preaching of the Gospel. All the public, or even private teaching or instructing, must consist wholly in reading of the Scriptures. How fatal this would be to religion, and how plainly it would overturn one great design of the ministry, needs not be proved. Nor need we insist in shewing, that it has been the practice of all Churches, in all times, even of such whose example ought to be of authority with us, I mean the apostolical Churches, to expound the Holy Scriptures, and teach the people the doctrines according to godliness, in the way most adapted to their several capacities and circumstances. Thus we find, that after the return of the captivity, as the *Levites read to the people in the book of the law of God distinctly, so they gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.* That this institution of preaching obtained in the Jewish synagogues, and was approved by our Saviour, seems pretty plain; and what was the common practice, and the received notion of this matter, seems evident from the eunuch's answer to Philip, Acts viii. 30, 31, "And Philip heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?" But it is indeed needless to insist upon a matter which seems to be agreed to upon all sides; nor have we any ground to suspect, that those who differ from us in the other point, are enemies to the office of the Ministry, and to the preaching of the Gospel.

Methinks whatever a man speaks concerning religion, he may subscribe it also; but he should be much more ready to give the most solemn assent himself to every thing which he delivers from the pulpit, as the will of God to the people. Nor can I imagine the smallest reason why a minister should refuse to subscribe his own sermon, and the doctrines taught in it. Ought there not to be as great sincerity,—as accurate caution that nothing be spoken there without a Divine war-

rant,—as inviolable a regard to truth,—as close an adherence to the revelation of the Gospel,—and as awful impressions of the great God, and the eternal concerns of men's souls, upon a minister in the pulpit, as anywhere else?

When a pastor of the Church stands in that place from which nothing but the sacred truths of the Gospel in all their purity and certainty should ever proceed; where, if at any time, he must *hold fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers*; where they stand as it were *in Christ's stead*, and speak as though God did by them *beseech men to be reconciled to him*; will he then venture to deviate from the great rule of his preaching, and play with his own office, and the souls of men, by making conjectures, and giving way to guesses of his own, the subscribing of which as articles of faith he will afterwards scruple at?

Every minister ought to *speak because he believes*; and when he preaches any thing from the pulpit, by these very words he confesses his own faith in the most solemn and awful manner, and virtually subscribes a Creed drawn up in these terms: so that the same reason that will confine Creeds to the precise phrases of Scripture, will confine sermons to them also; and then reading must be all that is meant by preaching. Yea, the argument seems much stronger in the case of preaching than in the other: for, in a Creed, a man, or a society, express their own opinion only, and declare what they think truth, in which there does not seem to be the least hazard in their using their own words; but in a sermon, the preacher pretends to deliver the mind of the Holy Ghost, and tell what He hath revealed unto the people; which would give at least a more plausible ground for restricting him to Scripture expressions. Yea, so extremely unreasonable is this notion, that it seems to be a consequence of it, that we should never write or speak at all about any religious subject, otherwise than by repeating the Scripture: since we may always attest with our hand what we affirm to be our opinion with our mouth.

And indeed it is scarce possible for our adversaries themselves to shun a contradiction of their notions in their own *practice, as the non-subscribers met at Salters' Hall seem to*

do, at that very time when they must have had that principle full in their view, and would readily be most cautious not to counteract it. I thought it very pleasant to take notice, that after all the clamour raised against declarations of faith in other words than those of Scripture, their advices to the Exeter people begin with two articles concerning Church communion, expressed in other words than those of the Sacred Oracles. "We are (say they) clearly of opinion, first, That there are errors in doctrine of that important nature, as will not only warrant, but even oblige, a Christian congregation to withdraw from the minister, or ministers, that maintain and defend these doctrines; second, That the people have a right to judge for themselves what these errors are, and when they are so taught and propagated, as will justify them in withdrawing from such their minister." These two propositions are subscribed by a great many hands; by doing which, they in so far evidently declare their belief concerning these two questions of Church communion, and private judgment, as much as if these articles had been engrossed in a Confession of Faith, and subscribed by them. Or if there be any terrible thing in the name of a Creed which startles them, (though those would seem extremely superstitious fears which are begot by a word), let any Church declare their opinion as to the other articles of religion to the same purpose, as is done with respect to these two points, and we shall be satisfied; being assured, that whatever external denomination may be put upon it, it will be all in effect that is meant or intended by Confessions of Faith.

This opinion likewise has a very unfavourable aspect towards all translations of the Bible, and seems to make it absolutely impracticable for such as are unacquainted with the Hebrew or Greek languages ever to declare their faith, and give a public assent to the doctrines of the Gospel, though it be an evident command of our Saviour to all Christians, upon proper occasions, to *confess Him and his Gospel before men, and to bear witness to the truth.*

Everybody must own, that the Bible written in the original tongues alone, consists, in a strict sense, of those phrases made use of by the Holy Ghost, and they only can be called

the words of Divine Revelation; and that no translation, for example no English phrases whatsoever, can have any title to that name, or pretend any dignity and authority of Scripture expressions, except only as they are a just interpretation of the Hebrew and Greek, and in so far as their signification corresponds to and gives the true sense of the original. And we hope it cannot be denied, that if, instead of this, an ignorant interpreter, or cunning deceiver, who was resolved at any rate to promote his favourite schemes, should translate a passage of the Greek New Testament into such English phrases as did not agree to the original, nor express the sense of the inspired writer, it were extremely absurd to call those English phrases scriptural words, or reckon that a man who assented to them, assented to the words of the Holy Ghost. When, therefore, a person subscribes a text as it is found in our English version, and designs to declare his faith thereby in scriptural phrases, because he thinks these only should be used in such cases, he must be supposed necessarily, by his subscription, to approve of our version of that text, rather than any other, and do what is virtually a declaring that he thinks the true meaning of the original expressed thereby; which is the same thing, as to all intents, as if he subscribed the articles of any particular Church in other terms than those of Scripture, or gave his assent to the Confessions of a party which he liked best.

To give a clearer idea of this, it may not be improper to illustrate it by one instance. A plain Englishman that understands nothing besides his native tongue, makes a declaration of his faith in Scripture expressions only; and amongst others, for that purpose, he makes use of the apostle's words, Rom. ix. 5, 'Ὡς οἱ πατέρες, καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σὰρκα, ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων Θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. Ἀμήν. The original expressions of the inspired writer may be rendered two ways: first, thus, as our version has it, *Whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever*: or, secondly, thus, *Whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came; God, who is over all, be blessed for ever*. The two translations are pretty different. By the words of the first, the deity of Christ seems to be plainly enough asserted; by those of the second,

that truth is not affirmed, because they may be well enough applied to God the Father. Now the words of both these translations cannot be denominated scriptural phrases; only he that subscribed one of them did in reality make use of Scripture language; while he that assented to the other used words of human invention, since there was no just foundation for them in the original language of the inspired penman: and, consequently, when a person makes choice of those English phrases which he reckons most agreeable to the mind of the Holy Ghost, does not he thereby in effect declare that he thinks the Calvinistic or Socinian translation preferable to the other, and so, to all effects and purposes, as much determines the sense in which he takes that Scripture, as if he had explained it in words of his own, and subscribed them as an article of his faith?

It is known to all those who have any acquaintance with controversy, how much all questions as to the doctrines of religion, depend upon the manner in which the principal texts relating to them ought to be translated; and it is a defect in language that they do not almost entirely do so. For could we free our phrases of all ambiguity, and use words in a determinate signification, that so we might certainly know what we mean by every expression, the chief controversy would then be, in what way such a text should be translated; because, by that means, it would be known what were truth and what were falsehood. And then Confessions of Faith might be so framed, that the chief thing imported by our subscribing them should be, that we believe such and such texts ought to be so translated; and that the interpretation given of them by the opposite side, is erroneous, and contrary to the mind of the Holy Ghost; or, which is the same thing, our Confessions would consist of those determinate words whereby one person or party thought the original texts should be translated, and upon that account called them Scripture phrases.

Would not Confessions of this kind be attended with all the supposed bad consequences,—would they not be invested with the same authority,—calculated for the same purposes,—and built upon the same foundations, with our present Creeds? And as the case just now obtains (when no language

has the advantage to be thus perfectly clear and determinate) with respect to the scheme of declarations of faith favoured by our adversaries, it is plain, that the words of no translation can be reckoned Scripture phrases, but in so far as they agree exactly to the original,—that, therefore, a man can never be desired to subscribe any passage of our English Bible, if he fancy that it is not rightly interpreted, more than he can be desired to assent to an article in words of human composure, for so the words of that text will appear to him; and that, for any society to expect that he should subscribe these English phrases, because they appear to them to be truly scriptural, is no less a human imposition, and a human decision in a religious controversy, than the framing for that purpose an article of the Westminster Confession.

If, then, these gentlemen's opinion in this matter were allowed, there could be no declaration of faith of any kind, except in Greek and Hebrew, in which alone the very phrases written by the inspired penmen are to be found; and, consequently, no person who did not understand these languages could ever perform the undisputed Christian duties, of *bearing a testimony to the truth, confessing our Saviour and his doctrines before men, and giving a reason of the hope which is in us to them that ask it*: which, besides other inconveniences, seems very favourable to the ambitious claims of the Pontiff, by its tending to deprive the people not only of the right of private judgment, but of private practice also.

It might possibly be shown by some plausible enough considerations, that there were no small difficulties, according to their scheme, in forming a Confession answerable to it, even in the Greek and Hebrew; and that therefore no persons whatsoever, even the most learned, could ever make Confessions of their Faith. But it is needless to insist upon this further, since what has been observed on the former head seems sufficient for that purpose.

Yea, so extremely absurd is this scheme, that, according to it, it would be impossible to frame a Confession, or an acknowledgment of a minister's or a private Christian's faith, *which the Church might expect an assent to, even in the*

original Greek and Hebrew texts of Scripture, supposing that the persons fully understood these languages. For if a minister should, for instance, doubt whether the text of Scripture that speaks most plainly of the divinity of our Saviour, ought to be understood of Him, and thinks it rather should be applied otherwise, he cannot possibly subscribe the original words of that text, so as they may be a test of his orthodoxy in this particular; and the Church which should determine their application to Jesus Christ, and require a minister or Christian, in order to his admission among them, to give his assent to these scriptural phrases so understood, would, equally with us, expose itself to all the clamorous objections which are made against human Creeds.

This will appear further, if we consider the several various readings which are to be found in the sacred writings; one of which alone is genuine, and must have the sole claim to the dignity and authority of inspired words. Now it seems, according to the principles of our adversaries, that no Church could fix upon this genuine reading, and require an assent to it from their public teachers; since that were indeed to determine what were Scripture, what not: and the demanding an assent to such a determination would be exclaimed against as an arbitrary imposition; as a native consequence of which, no public Confession of Faith could be composed in the words of such texts of Scripture as admit of various readings, whereby a great many passages of the Holy Oracles would be necessarily excluded.

This difficulty will prove of greater extent and importance with respect to those who deny the Divine authority of some of those books of the New Testament which have been generally received by Christians; as, on the other hand, were this novel scheme of Confessions allowed, such people as Mr Whiston, who would obtrude upon the Church a new set of pretended inspired writers, might allege, that a profession of their faith in the phrases of those books adopted by them, and embraced as the Word of God, were sufficient to all the privileges of Christian or ministerial communion; and that it were a manifest invasion of their religious freedom to require any other tests of orthodoxy from them. And surely

it seems to argue every way as great an authority in matters of faith, for a Church to determine what books she thinks Divinely inspired, and which must accordingly be owned as such by her members, as it is for the same Church to declare what doctrines she judges to be the fundamental principles of Christianity, unto which all ought to give their assent who lay claim to Church privileges, or at least pretend to the office of a public teacher.

In the next place, it is hoped, upon a short view, it will be acknowledged, even by our adversaries themselves, that if Creeds be confined to Scripture expressions, negative articles of faith must be necessarily excluded; by which is understood that part of Confessions whereby errors and heresies are disclaimed and renounced. Of this nature is our short Confession of Faith, afterwards called the *National Covenant*, where all the abominations of Popery are particularly disowned, with a just abhorrence of them. The reason of the thing, and many passages of Scripture,—the regard due to the truths of the Gospel, and the honour of our Saviour's doctrine,—that openness of mind, and constant sincerity, which Christians should manifest on all occasions, and especially with relation to the concerns of their soul,—the duty incumbent upon all those who maintain the purity and unity of faith, to reject obstinate heretics, and separate themselves from the unclean,—together with the sacred caution which every man ought to have with respect to his integrity and reputation; all concur in demonstrating, that it is both reasonable and necessary for Christians, upon proper occasions, to declare their detestation of monstrous heresies which prevail at any time in the Church, and to clear themselves of any ground of suspicion that they are infected by the poison of them. And this kind of Creeds is especially incumbent upon those who forsake a false religion, or a heretical sect, and desire to be received into the communion of the Church.

But now it is absolutely impossible that such a Confession can be composed in Scripture phrases; because the heresies to be renounced, had not then sprung up, and therefore there could be no place for any thing, in express terms, concerning them, with the sacred writers. How can the blasphemies

of the Manichees and Valentinians,—the dreams of the German Anabaptists, and other fanatics,—the superstitious idolatrous practices, and the tyrannical absurd principles of the Church of Rome, concerning transubstantiation, purgatory, the authority and infallibility of the Pope, &c., or any other extravagant notion that may creep into the minds of deluded men and obtain in the world, be renounced, and our faith concerning those points in opposition to them, be expressed in Scripture phrases only, when all these deformed monsters are but of modern growth, and both the things themselves, and the words whereby they are signified, were invented after a finishing hand was put to the writing of the Divine Oracles? But if, in order to evade this objection, it be owned, that it is allowable to express the negative part of a Confession in other words than those used by the sacred writers, besides that they will hereby depart from their general principle, they seem to yield the whole cause; since it would be very easy to give such a turn to a Creed, that the whole of it may consist of negative articles, so framed as to comprehend and enforce the same things which are affirmed by the positive parts of a Confession.

In the last place, that Creeds ought not to be confined to the phrases of the Holy Scriptures, but that other words may be lawfully used, appears from this consideration, namely, that it is simply impossible to declare our belief of Scripture consequences, however necessary and momentous they be, in the precise terms of the Bible; and so by this scheme it might be rendered impracticable for a Church to own her belief of, and profess her respect for, some Divine truths of the highest importance, or to make confession of some of the chief articles of our religion; which seems alone to be a pretty great absurdity, and enough of itself to overthrow any scheme which is justly loaded with it.

It would be improper to enter at this time upon questions that have of late been agitated, and upon the determination of which some seem to lay no little weight, viz.—How far Scripture consequences are binding upon a man who does not see them?—If they have in any case the same authority over our faith with the words of the Sacred Oracles, and we be no less obliged to receive them?—and, lastly, How far God

will charge home upon any man the disbelief or neglect of those consequences which he does not perceive? For though perhaps it would be no laborious task to return an answer to them, and shew the mistakes which some writers have fallen into upon this head, yet the doing of it would take up too much place in this work; and it is acknowledged on all hands, that there may be Scripture consequences of a very high nature,—that truths of this kind may be very important and useful in themselves,—and that they may be such as claim a steady adherence to them, and a warm zeal and honour from all who perceive them.

I shall only, therefore, observe, that the resurrection of the dead, which our Saviour demonstrates in this way to the Sadducees,—the principal things relating to the immortality of the soul of man, and the state of happiness and misery,—the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, and the eternal salvation from sin and all its fatal consequences, to be purchased by Him,—the whole design of the Jewish ceremonies and sacrifices, and all the great truths of religion which God intended to lead them to the knowledge of by the help of these external ordinances;—in a word, the whole reasoning of the apostle, in that excellent epistle to the Hebrews, and the doctrine contained in the great original promise, *That the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head*, which was for so many ages the hope and joy of the Church, were all *Scripture consequences*: and so the Israelites could not have professed their faith of these articles, had they been tied down to the very phrases of the inspired writers, which, as to the external form of them, were evidently calculated for a legal carnal dispensation; that is, they could not have professed the Jewish religion at all. They might indeed, by adhering to the letter of the law, have professed themselves the carnal seed of Abraham, and showed that they were of the concision: but then they must go no farther; they must beware of confessing that they were of the spiritual seed of Abraham, and children of the promise. No; the Scribes might justly have accused them of setting up new rules of faith, and contradicting the perfection, sufficiency, and perspicuity of the Sacred Writings, had they pretended to *distinguish* themselves from them, by another profession

of their faith, and by expressing their belief of what they thought the design of all their institutions, and the voice of their whole ordinances, so as to confess before the world, that they were "of the circumcision, who worshipped God in the spirit, and had no confidence in the flesh."

It was one great thing which our Saviour blamed in the Pharisees, that, under a pretence of doing honour to Moses, and adhering to the law, they maintained, that the *letter* of the law was sufficient, and that, if a man in his faith and practice kept up to it, there could be no more required of him; whereby they struck at the vitals of religion, and stifled the *spirit* of it. I cannot help thinking, that those who exclaim so loudly against human composures, and would receive an assent to the letter of the Scriptures, and a subscription of the phrases therein contained, by a person, (though we be ignorant of his meaning, and he refuse to explain the sense in which he understands them,) as a sufficient test of his orthodoxy, or measure of Christian or ministerial communion, build their schemes upon the maxims of the Scribes, and seem to introduce into the Christian Church the old Jewish Pharisaism.

These are some of the native consequences of the opinions espoused by our adversaries,—and such are the advantages which religion and liberty may expect upon their prevailing in the world. Into such inconsistencies and absurdities we can scarce fail to fall, so long as words are regarded more than things; so long as that submission, honour, and veneration, due to the Sacred Writings, are paid rather to the phrases than to the truths and doctrines contained in them; and, instead of the purity of faith, and the conviction of the understanding, empty sounds are looked upon as a distinguishing mark of Christianity, and an agreement in words and combinations of letters, a strong enough foundation for Christian communion.

There are two passages in two remarkable papers lately published, which fall in naturally upon this occasion; and it may not be improper to make a very short observation upon them. In the 5th of the *Reasons for not Subscribing the Paper offered at Salters' Hall, March 3, 1718-19*, published by

the non-subscribers, they say, "We have always thought, that such human declarations of faith were far from being eligible on their own account, since they tend to narrow the foundations of Christianity, and to restrain that latitude of expression in which our great Legislator has thought fit to deliver His will to us."

To reduce Christianity within straiter bounds than our Saviour has thought fit, is certainly extremely culpable. To fix narrower terms of Christian communion than the Author of our religion has appointed, and exclude our neighbours from the fellowship of the saints or the privileges of the Church, because they refuse to comply with those terms, is both uncharitable to our brethren, and a presumptuous usurpation upon the prerogative of our great Master. We are far from pretending to alter the landmarks of Christianity, or build upon any other foundations besides those which Christ and his Apostles have laid; and whether we have done so or not, must depend upon an impartial inquiry into the doctrines espoused by us. But it seems not easy to comprehend what is understood by that latitude of expression in which our great Legislator is supposed to have delivered his will: for indeed, properly speaking, there may be a latitude of things, of terms of communion, and necessary articles of faith; but there can be no such thing as a latitude of expression; because all words ought to be of a fixed meaning,—that is, ought to be of a determinate measure,—and cannot be stretched wider, according to the fancy of the reader. And agreeably hereto, the words of Scripture have but one meaning; the Holy Ghost designs by them to represent to us *some determinate doctrine or truth*; and if that be misapprehended, whatever become of the expression, we refuse, or neglect to receive, that part of the Gospel Revelation.

To imagine that our blessed Saviour delivered his will to us in such extended and variable expressions, that they might suit the palate of all parties, and comprehend every sect,—that they were so supple as to bend to the notions that this and the other man should take up of the truth pointed at in them,—and were of such a latitude, that persons who thought very differently concerning the doctrines, might

safely enough assent to the expressions, and every man explain them his own way; is imagining such a latitude of expression in the Scriptures, as renders them of no meaning or signification that can be depended upon;—it is forming them into a nose of wax, and so entirely destroying their authority, and counteracting all the valuable ends for which they were delivered to us;—and I am afraid, that the words of the non-subscribers may be thought by some to look this way, how distant soever this might be from the intention of many worthy persons of that number.

The author of the *Occasional Paper* tells us, "That were men to declare their assent to all the expressions in which these doctrines are delivered in Scripture, though they should not receive, or though, it may be, they object to explications in unscriptural words, they are not to be denied the communion of the Christian Church merely on that account." It is easily acknowledged, that no person who receives the fundamental articles of Christianity, and disclaims all errors that strike at the life and essence of the Gospel, can be justly denied the communion of the Church; but if we abstract from the doctrines of religion, what force or efficacy can be in an assent to the expressions of the Scripture? There is reason to suspect, that a person means another thing by these phrases than the Scriptures mean, and really denies the truth revealed in them. To suppose that an assent to the expressions will entitle him to Church communion, is to expose the Bible to the utmost contempt, and, in reality, to make them so many charms, whereby a man, without considering what he believes in his heart, may be enchanted into orthodoxy. If the subscribing these expressions do not involve a belief of the truth, and signify something that is plain and determinate, it becomes an airy phantom, and, in a literal sense, only a form of sound words, without the substance.

In the Confessions of our Faith we must profess things, and not words; and expressions assented to are to be regarded only upon the account of what is signified by them. This is the account which the apostle seems to give us of this matter: "Hold fast," says he to Timothy, "the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in FAITH

and love which is in Christ Jesus. **THAT GOOD THING** which was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us." It was real *faith*, and *that good thing*, which put life into the *form of sound words*, and made them what they were; and, had he let go *that good thing*, and departed from *the faith*, his *form of sound words*, and the loudest assent to Scripture expressions, would have neither secured to him the dignity of his office, nor the communion of saints; but they would have had the same influence on the assenter to these expressions that the gift of tongues has on a man who wants charity,—have made him *a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal*.

Thus we have endeavoured, in several instances, to lay open the absurd consequences, which seem to demonstrate the falsehood of their opinion, who would confine all Confessions of Faith to the precise words and phrases of the Holy Scriptures; and that it is highly reasonable and necessary for Christians, upon some occasions, to distinguish themselves from heretics, and profess the purity of the faith in other words and phrases. It remains that we show more directly, that Confessions framed on such a method are not in the least injurious to the dignity and excellency of the Holy Scriptures, and are no wise inconsistent with the Protestant principles of the absolute perfection, fulness, and perspicuity of the Sacred Oracles, with respect to all the concerns of faith and salvation. And seeing what has been already advanced may be easily applied by any to this purpose, we shall but very briefly mention two or three considerations; each of which, we hope, may by itself prove a satisfying answer to the objection.

That the expressions of the Scripture are not sufficient for all the ends of Confessions of Faith, does not in the least flow from themselves, nor depend upon any supposed defect in the Holy Oracles, which needs to be supplied, but is entirely owing to the ignorance and wickedness of vain and cunning heretics, who pervert their meaning, and impose a sense upon them directly contrary to the will and mind of our great Legislator;—and, consequently, the necessity of other phrases, in-order to our giving, or receiving from others,

a sincere and undisguised account of the faith that is embraced, in an age where such corruptions prevail, does not bear the smallest reflection upon the Word of God, but must be imputed wholly to the errors and deceits of mankind.

Phrases which have no determinate signification affixed to them, are of no manner of use, and give no instruction to the hearers; and words which in the mouth of the speaker are of an ambiguous interpretation, and when pronounced by different persons may signify different and contradictory doctrines, can by no man who deals ingenuously be depended upon as a sufficient test of a man's orthodoxy, or received as a tolerable argument of his true opinions. And to say, that the words of Scripture are often exposed to this fate, and meet with such treatment in the world, is to say no more than what we have daily experience of, and what is affirmed in direct terms by the apostle, 2 Pet. iii. 16; where he tells us, that "there are many things in the epistles of Paul which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction."

These phrases of the sacred writers, as they lie in the Holy Scriptures, might be perspicuous enough, and sufficiently expressive of the doctrines of religion; but surely, if we consider them as used by these unstable persons, wrested and perverted, they could not possibly be a satisfying evidence of the purity of their faith. The apostle informs us, that the best and purest things may be perverted to the worst purposes, so that the holy law of the blessed God himself is made an engine of sin, to advance its dominion: "But sin," says he, "taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence." And, "Sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good."

Can it then be justly reckoned any disesteem of the Sacred Writings, to allege, that the words of them may be shaped into a disguise, designed to give false ornaments, and a deceitful beauty, to the most deformed monsters of infidelity, and under a fair appearance to conceal the poison and malignity of error? And when these phrases, in themselves so good and innocent, are formed into a covert under which

heretics screen themselves, and a retreat from which they make excursions into the regions of light and truth; and whither, when attacked by the strongest arguments, they flee back for shelter; is it a crime to detect them, to pull off the false face, and, by a prudent caution, to preserve ourselves from the danger of infection from a lurking plague, and the guilt of partaking of other men's sins, and entertaining communication with the works of darkness and error? So that to affirm, that it may be necessary in the public Creeds, to make use of phrases that are not to be found in the Scriptures, is not in the least to allege, that the Scriptures are deficient, or the expressions of them not full and clear; but only that there are men in the world who wrest them,—and that cunning heretics use them in a sense quite different from their genuine meaning,—and so only make a pretence of them, to lead astray unwary souls by their fair speeches, assuming the form, while they have no remains of the power of truth and light.

In the next place,—Though it should be asserted, that the truths revealed in some passages of Scripture may be expressed in plainer terms, and such as are not so liable to be wrested by heretics, and that words may be found out, not so much exposed to the disadvantage of an ambiguous indeterminate meaning, and under which it may be more difficult to conceal a false and dangerous opinion; yet this would not be the least reflection upon the perfection and sufficiency of the Scriptures: and to think otherwise must proceed from very mistaken notions hereof, and from a false idea of the Protestant principles.

The excellency of any composure consists in all the parts of it being exactly suited to the ends for which they are designed; and agreeably hereto, the absolute perfection of the Holy Scriptures lies in their having all their parts, every word, every phrase, proportioned, in the wisest and best manner, to the purposes of the great Legislator, and so contrived that they are both sufficient for all the ends of Divine Revelation, and that they gain these ends in the most admirable and excellent manner: and it were highly injurious to the glory of Him whose understanding is infinite, and to the dignity and *honour of the Bible*, to suppose, that any words of ours can

be fitter, or in a better manner expressive of Gospel truths. But then it is affirmed, without proof, that in order to the perfection of any part of the Bible, the doctrine contained in it should be represented in the most clear and plain manner that could be thought of. For how valuable soever a quality this might be thought, if taken separately, yet if we consider any text in all its circumstances, and with a relation to the other parts of the Bible, and the complex design of Divine Revelation, perhaps a greater degree of perspicuity would diminish its lustre, and lessen the excellency of the whole. God may have wise and good purposes to accomplish by the Scripture, which will make it necessary that all the parts of it be not equally clear, nor the phrases so perspicuous as they might have been. And that this has obtained in fact, is very evident. Can anybody question, whether those places of the Old Testament, by which the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the just, the end and meaning of the whole ceremonial law, with many other fundamental articles of their faith, which were revealed to the Jewish Church, might not have been made much clearer, and plainer expressions of them found out? They were revealed, indeed, by their Scriptures; but so far were these Scriptures from being expressed with the utmost perspicuity, that, long after them, *life and immortality* are said to be *brought to light by the Gospel*.

Is it not evident, that there are phrases which would express those truths with more clearness than our Saviour's parables, though they were levelled principally at the plainest things in religion, the practice of it? His disciples did not understand the meaning of them till they were explained in more perspicuous terms: and yet these parables, as delivered in the public assemblies, were a part of the Holy Oracles. Our Saviour himself gives us this reason of his conduct, "And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them."

Had these parabolical Scriptures been made plainer, they would not have been so accurately adjusted to the Legislator's

intention; and, consequently, that additional perspicuity, instead of raising their excellency, would have proved an evident imperfection.

And the apostle tells us expressly, that in the writings of Paul *there are some things hard to be understood*; which things certainly could have been delivered in clearer expressions.

The infinitely wise God had several different purposes to serve, with respect to different persons and circumstances, by the Holy Scriptures; and the admirable perfection of those Divine Records must not be made to depend upon the utmost degree of any one quality, or their fitness to one particular case,—but it really consists in the frame and disposition of the whole, and all the parts of it, when taken together, being exactly adapted to the complex state and design of the Gospel Revelation: and it is enough to answer all the cavils of adversaries, with respect to the perspicuity of the Bible, if the necessary truths of religion, and those doctrines which God requires the knowledge of from sincere Christians, be revealed in the Scripture with such certainty and evidence, that persons of whatever capacity may attain the assured discovery of them, in a diligent use of all appointed means, and a humble dependence on the enlightening assistances of the Holy Spirit, who leads those that have such a sincere and pious disposition into “all truth.” But then the perspicuity of Scripture expressions is calculated for diligence, and not for laziness. It is plain enough to be comprehended by a careful and impartial inquirer; it is not so clear but that it may be easily mistaken by a mind biassed with prejudices, clouded with passions, dissolved into soft pleasures, or blown up with pride or vanity. Nor is it such a clearness, that it will be immediately perceived, and give light to a man abandoned to his ease, and who will not be at the pains to search after truth. So that the perfection and perspicuity of the Scriptures are not of such a nature as to imply that the most obvious expressions of Christian doctrines are always made use of, and that it is impossible to fall upon plainer and easier phrases than are to be found in some texts.

Were the Holy Scriptures and Confessions of Faith *calculated for the same purposes*, it were an impious vanity,

and a contemptuous impeachment of the Word of God, to think any phrases but Scriptural ones necessary, or that Creeds could be better formed in words of our own; since that were to imagine, that we could contrive words more adapted to their design than those of the Spirit of God were to His. But if the Scriptures were levelled at another mark than Confessions are, and so the composure of them was to be regulated by different measures, then it cannot be the smallest reflection upon the Scriptures, that some phrases may be more proper for Creeds than the precise terms of the Bible; because, though these terms were infinitely well suited for their own design, they needed not be perfectly adjusted to the intentions of another composure.

Now the Holy Scriptures are designed for a perpetual and universal rule of faith and manners, to all places,—in all ages,—and with respect to Christians of whatsoever language or condition; and therefore the phrases of them must be fitted to this comprehensive and enlarged view, and must not be confined to the special circumstances of one age or country. On the contrary, Confessions of Faith are of a limited nature: they must be adapted to the particular state of nations and of periods,—to the heresies which at any time rage with the greatest fury,—the various subterfuges of heretics,—and the disguises under which they endeavour to conceal themselves. What sense they use words in must be examined, and the different turn which their schemes and notions may take must be considered, in order to form a Creed aright; and so, according to the variety of cases, some phrases may be proper in one case, which in another would entirely miss the end; and different Churches may see it fit for them to make alterations in their Creeds, and use different expressions.

Now where is the smallest injury done to the Holy Scriptures, if it should be asserted, that the phrases of a *general universal rule* are not always the fittest for the *special uses of a particular society*; that the words of a human composure may better answer the exigencies of a particular age or place, and may be more exactly proportioned to the nature of some errors, and the circumstances of some heretics, than the Scriptural phrases; because these were not designed for that

single case, but had a much more extensive view; while, in the meantime, it is acknowledged, that the words and terms of the Bible are incomparably better adjusted to the ends of the Holy Ghost in inditing them, than any words of man's devising can possibly be?

But there remains one consideration further, which we hope will fully clear this matter, and demonstrate the vanity of the objection, and that the present question has no relation to the excellency or perspicuity of the Holy Scriptures, nor can have the smallest influence upon the Protestant principles concerning them.

When we speak of the perspicuity and plainness of Scripture phrases, we evidently consider them as they lie in the Sacred Oracles, and as they are expressions of the Christian doctrine, and of the mind of our great Legislator; and so the only meaning of the Protestant principle is, that in the Scriptures the Holy Ghost has revealed to us the will of God, and the truths of the Gospel whereof he requires the belief, in so simple a style, and in so plain a manner, that without any addition, or the authority of human explication, every ordinary Christian, who with sincerity and diligence shall make use of the means laid to his hand, may find out the true sense, and attain the knowledge of things pertaining to salvation; and, consequently, that the Bible is of itself, independent of Tradition, and of the Church, a full, perspicuous, and infallible rule of faith and manners. So that when we speak of the plainness and excellency of Scripture phrases, we consider them as the words of the Holy Ghost, and expressions of the mind of God to us.

In which sense none shall be readier than we to acknowledge the certainty and evidence of Scripture expressions,—that they are as clear declarations of the mind of the Holy Spirit, concerning the truths of religion, as the most determinate phrases of any human Confession can be, and incomparably better adjusted to the ends of Divine Revelation,—and that there is no manner of ambiguity and uncertainty in their signification. For my part, I always thought many texts of Scripture as plain and positive declarations of the divinity of our Saviour, and his being one God with the *Father*, as could be invented;—and that the words of the

Bible are as clear and determinate, not only with regard to this, but also to the other important articles of our faith, as the words of any Creed are. So that, had the very phrases made use of in the Westminster Confession, to affirm the divinity of our Saviour, and contradict the Arian and Socinian heresies, been inserted in the Scriptures by the inspired writers, I should not have thought them more clear and evident, or freer from ambiguity, or the hazard of being taken in different senses by different persons, than the expressions which the divine writers actually made use of really are. So that thus far, I hope, we entertain as high notions of the sufficiency and perspicuity of the Scripture phrases as our adversaries can possibly do; and are far from comparing with them, even in the point of clearness, the words of any human composure, or the Creed of any Church whatsoever.

Why then do we make use of other phrases in the declarations of our faith,—and upon that very account, that those of the Bible are too variable and indeterminate, and so liable to an ambiguous signification, that an assent to them would not be a sufficient test of a minister's orthodoxy? And how is this reconcilable with what has been just now acknowledged concerning the clearness and fulness of the Scriptural phrases?

The case is very evident. Confessions of Faith are not immediately designed to give an account of what the Holy Ghost says concerning such an article, but of what such a person or Church believes; and so the words of a Creed or Confession are not expressions of the will of the Holy Ghost, but of our faith, and of the mind of the subscriber. And when a consideration is had of the proper terms in which Creeds should be drawn up, the question is not,—Whether such phrases be very plain significations of the mind of God revealed in the Bible? but,—Whether they will be a clear enough expression of your mind who make the profession of your faith? For it is very possible, that these words, as they lie in the Scripture, may be very evident, and without any ambiguity; and yet, when made use of by you, they may be of a very intricate and uncertain meaning—so that it is the sense of the speaker, or subscriber of a Confession, which is the thing wanted; and if we be not informed what

meaning he affixes to them, how plain soever the scriptural phrases are in themselves, with respect to the present case, they may be very obscure, and evidently insufficient.

Everybody in the least acquainted with language, must be sensible, that the same words may have different significations, and should be interpreted differently, according to the circumstances of the persons who use them,—their way of writing,—the age in which they live,—and the sect or party to which they belong; that in the mouth or in the writings of one person, they may have a plain easy meaning, level to every body's capacity; whereas, in those of another, they may be very intricate and ambiguous; and except he use clearer expressions, it may be impossible to attain any assurance of his sentiments.

The signification of terms is altered by a variety of causes, of which it will be sufficient to give one instance. These words, so famous in theological controversies, *merit*, *satisfaction*, *priest*, *altar*, *sacrifice*, &c., have been applied to extremely different purposes, and the meaning of them came at length to be entirely changed; so that these words have a very different signification in the writings of Tertullian, Cyprian, &c., from what they obtain in the composures of Bellarmine, Suarez, and their associates.

Now should persons living in these distant ages have subscribed Creeds composed by them, in which such phrases frequently occurred, their assent to them would have been so far from testifying the harmony of their faith, or laying a foundation for Church communion, that, on the contrary, with one man such a subscription would have signified that he was an orthodox Christian,—with another man it would have been declaring that he was a Papist.

And had these terms been assented to by a person living in some of the intermediate ages, when there was not a total change made in their signification, and it was uncertain whether they should be understood according to the use which Cyprian or which Suarez makes of them, it seems evident, that his subscription would have been absolutely useless; because these phrases were then very ambiguous, and so extremely unfit to give a clear representation of a

person's faith. But will this in the least reflect on the language of the Primitive Fathers? or will it argue that they did not write clearly and plainly, because afterwards the phrases used by them became indistinct and dubious?

I know that words in the Scripture are taken in the most obvious sense, and that which, considering all circumstances, must be their signification according to the exactest rules of the truest criticism. I know what the fixed and determinate meaning of such phrases was at that time, and am sure, that the Holy Ghost, inspiring the prophets and apostles, could never mistake the just sense of words, or take them in a strained foreign way,—that He never could have a design to hide his mind, and disguise his doctrine by ambiguous and deceitful terms;—that the Scriptures dictated by Him were perfectly harmonious in all their parts, adorned with a noble simplicity, and free from any degree of artifice; and therefore the expressions of the Sacred Oracles are an open, plain, and impartial representation of the doctrines contained in them, and are simple and fixed in their signification, so as they may be understood by all who sincerely apply their minds to the discovery of the truth.

Upon the other hand, when these phrases are made use of in Confessions, they are the words of fallible men, and, it may be, of cunning heretics, who want only so fair a vizard as the form and appearance of Scripture expressions, under which they may conceal the poison of their errors, and impose upon the simple, who may, and certainly, on one side or other, do, mistake the genuine and original sense of these Scripture terms; and, consequently, in their mouths they express very different things from what they do as they lie in the Bible.

We have the most convincing experience that these phrases, in the age and country where the Creed is formed, are understood variously by several men; one of them means one thing, and another the quite contrary, when he pronounces them: in which case, it is evident, that they are dark ambiguous words, the signification of which is to be determined,—that they are not at all sufficiently plain expressions of a man's faith,—that it is impossible, without an

explication, to know what is meant by them,—and that more clear and easy terms must be made use of, in order to attain any of the valuable and necessary ends of Confessions.

But then this has really nothing to do with the dispute concerning the perfection of the Scriptures; for those very phrases which are obscure, and scarce intelligible expressions of the thoughts and opinions of a man, or a society, now-a-days, considering the different nature and circumstances, as we have just now in part represented, yet may be, and are, very distinct and clear expressions of the mind of God, as they lie in the Scriptures; because it is really this difference of persons and circumstances which occasions the obscurity, and makes the words unfit in one case which are made use of with infinite wisdom in another.

Though, therefore, we affirm with confidence, that other words and phrases are absolutely necessary to give a fair and plain Confession of the faith of Christians, and distinguish betwixt those who receive the truths of the Gospel, and such as have fallen away from them and been led aside by errors and heresies, considering the present state of religious controversies, and the ambiguous sense in which Scripture phrases are at present used by different persons; yet since we maintain, in perfect consistency with this, the absolute sufficiency, fulness, and perspicuity of the Sacred Oracles,—that the phrases in them are chosen with admirable wisdom, and in all respects suited to the nature and designs of a book that was to be a complete and infallible rule of faith and manners to all the members of the Church in all ages,—and that those terms are, without the authority of any human explication, clear and certain expressions of the mind of the Holy Ghost, it is evident, we act in a perfect agreement with the Protestant principles, and are not chargeable with the smallest appearance of disregard to the honour and excellency of the Divine Writings.

Everybody in the least acquainted with the principles of the Church of Rome, and the state of the controversy, must see, that the only dispute is,—Whether, without the interposition of the Church, and the help of Tradition, the *Scriptures are of themselves* a sufficiently full and plain declara-

tion of the mind of God, and the doctrines of salvation, to the whole body of Christians? but not at all,—Whether the phrases of Scripture are a clear and plain enough expression of the mind of men, and of the opinions of this and the other particular Church or person? nor,—Whether it may not be necessary for them, upon some occasions, to confess Christ, and *give a reason of the hope that is in them*, in other words? This is a question the Papists are not in the least concerned in; nor can the determination of it have the smallest influence upon the controversy betwixt the Protestants and them relating to this point.

It seems, then, to flow from an entire mistake of the question, that our opinion concerning the phrases and terms in which human Confessions may and ought to be expressed, is alleged to be a departure from the Protestant principles, and an approach to the Popish maxims; and that so very unconnected and distant controversies as these are should be so unreasonably confounded together.

As a very great injury is done to all the Reformed Churches who make the same use of Confessions that we do, and they are treated in a method which has as little claim to good manners and modesty as to justice, when they are so loudly accused of self-contradiction, and of detraction from the Holy Scriptures; so an affront is indeed offered to the Bible, when an imaginary regard to the excellency and perfection of it is made a handle to promote the interests of a cause in which it is no wise concerned, and to influence the minds of the sober and more religious persons, who will no doubt be extremely moved by every thing which has the least appearance of sullyng the glory of Divine Revelation, or contradicting the sufficiency and perfection of the Word of God. Nor is it any honour done to the Scriptures, to drag them into the field of controversy, and out of their dignity, excellency, and perspicuity, to busk up a form of truth and godliness, under which notions of a very different nature might appear more plausible, and make deeper impressions upon Christians.

Having so fully considered these two great objections against Creeds, which contain almost the whole strength of

our adversaries, and endeavoured to vindicate the principles and practice of our Church in this matter, from the charge of tyranny, or any mixture of spiritual usurpation over the consciences of mankind and the inalienable right of private judgment, and from the imputation of any thing that is dishonourable to the Sacred Writings, or contradictory to the Protestant principles,—there remains only an objection or two of lesser moment to be considered; and they will be the easier removed, because now in our reasoning we may proceed upon the supposition, that Confessions are perfectly agreeable to the liberties of mankind, and to the dignity and perfection of the Word of God.

(3.) The third kind of objections which are brought against Confessions are founded upon the bad influence which it is alleged they have on the interests both of learning and religion. It is said, That the confining men to the belief of certain articles, or at least depriving them of worldly advantages, such as their stipends, upon their publishing opinions contrary to the public standards, is a mighty bias upon their understandings, straitens them in their inquiries after truth,—prepossesses with prejudices, and prevents great and noble advances in knowledge;—that hereby men have a great argument to become hypocrites, and so to be lost to all religion, while they are afraid to declare their real sentiments, and tempted to counterfeit a belief of doctrines with which their temporal fortunes and conveniences are so closely connected;—that in such circumstances an uncommon progress in any part of Theological learning is so far from being encouraged, that, on the contrary, it seems a crime to be wiser and more knowing than others, or to discover errors and mistakes in the opinions of the Church, and the composures of fallible men;—that such means of preserving the purity of the Christian faith, as Creeds are alleged by their admirers to be, will do at least more harm to true religion than good; because, according to our scheme concerning Confessions, the same methods will be followed by all societies and churches, of whatever principles and party they be; and, consequently, such Confessions will tend *as much to the disadvantage of sound doctrine, and to the*

security of error, as it can do to the preservation of truth where it is established;—and that Paganism, Mahometanism, and Popery, having got into the possession of the public chairs and pulpits in the far greatest number of countries, heresy and darkness will be greater gainers by this scheme than light and purity.

A great many things might be observed upon this subject, were it proper on this occasion to give a full illustration of it; but it is hoped the few considerations following may be sufficient for the vindication of Confessions.

Should we acknowledge, that Confessions of Faith have been sometimes abused, and been made the occasion of the evils complained of,—that covetous and fearful persons have been induced to conceal their real sentiments, by the prospect of the disadvantages they might be exposed to, should it be known that they had departed from the received doctrine,—and that men of learning have been in some places induced to smother useful and new discoveries, and thereby have lost them to the republic of letters; yet this will be no good argument against the use of Confessions, and the benefits which may be reaped by them, because the best and noblest things in the world have had the same fate, and been perverted by the corruptions of mankind to the most unworthy purposes. The law of God itself, as we formerly mentioned, however pure and holy, became an instrument of sin, whereby it wrought death. The most meek and peaceable religion that ever appeared in the world, gave rise to the most furious animosities, and unnatural cruelties; it *sent fire and sword abroad upon the earth*, and put the nearest relations, even parents and children, at variance. The grace of God has been turned into lasciviousness; and the great foundation of the Gospel, the cross of Christ, was *to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness*. Were, therefore, all these things to be rejected? or could the evils, which sprung from the depravity and weakness of mankind, be justly attributed to the innocent occasions of them?

The temporalities of Church-officers, or the stipends which any society may bestow upon their ministers, and which they cannot enjoy but upon condition of their subscribing the established Confessions, and adhering to the doctrine

contained in them, are the chief things to be considered in this argument; because it is the apprehension of the loss of these temporalities which is the occasion of the alleged disadvantages to religion and learning. Now let us plainly state the case, and see if the opinion of our adversaries be not incomparably more unreasonable, and exposed to much greater inconveniences.

A society, in order to propagate and increase the knowledge of what they think the faith of the Gospel, give such an encouragement to a minister, that if a person may get into this office, he may be tempted to dissemble his true opinions, and make a false profession of his faith; therefore, to prevent this, that society must bestow the same encouragement upon him, whatever turn of thought he follow, though that should lead him necessarily to destroy that very cause, the promoting of which was the only reason why such a benefice was granted to anybody.

I have an esteem and honour for a man because of his religious qualities; I value the purity of his light and knowledge, the probity of his manners, and the sacred regard to truth and piety, which give a lustre to the whole of his life. Another, to get into my favourable thoughts, plays the hypocrite,—puts a disguise upon his opinions, which he thinks I would believe heterodox,—and imitates the appearance of a devotion which does not warm his heart, and inspire his affections. Therefore, to prevent this, I must remove the temptation from him, by showing an equal regard to virtue and vice, truth and error; nor must I place my esteem or bestow favours, more upon the most excellent Christian than the most profligate wretch. These are the native consequences, and such is the life and spirit which give force to this objection against Confessions; which is enough to show the weakness of it.

An inconvenience must always be of less moment than an absurdity. Upon one side, it can only be alleged, that by establishing Confessions we do a thing which, however just and necessary it be in our opinion, yet is acknowledged by us to be liable to abuse, and that, through the corruptions of mankind, it may have bad effects; but, on the other hand, *if this be neglected*, we do a thing which appears directly

contrary to our consciences, and inconsistent with the duty of all Christian societies—to make use of the necessary means of professing the purity of their own faith, and trying the qualifications of their ministers; which last is incomparably more forcible, and must determine us, whatever accidental consequences may accompany it.

According to the principles of our Confession, every man should search after the truth with the utmost impartiality,—attend to the voice of Divine Revelation, though it may sound very differently in his ears from the public standards of any fallible Church.—and not suffer his conscience to be bribed by his interest, or the light of the Gospel to be overclouded by the mists and vapours of temporal ease and felicity. It is base and inglorious for any person to dissemble the truth when he discovers it, or neglect any proper means of spreading it in the world, because thereby he may disoblige the majority, and lose their favour. But if, notwithstanding these considerations, any should be found of so despicable a spirit as to be bribed by these temporalities, and prefer them to truth and conscience, the whole blame ought to be laid upon himself; and it can never be supposed, that to prevent it all societies and churches must be deprived of their undisputed rights, and forced to act directly contrary to their judgments, with respect to the doctrinal qualifications of their ministers.

This way of reasoning made use of by the adversaries of Confessions, if it were pushed as far as it might, would pull up the roots of all religion, and enervate the plainest duties of Christianity. And indeed persons of libertine principles, and those who usurp the name they have so little just claim to, of free-thinkers, improve it for this very purpose.

They observe, that education gives a mighty bias to the understandings of mankind, and has a great influence in forming their principles,—that the far greatest part of the world lies buried in ignorance, and embraces a false religion,—and, consequently, education, with the greatest number, gives them an early prejudice against truth, and prepossesses their tender minds in favour of error and idolatry. From this disadvantageous influence which education is alleged to have upon religion, they will conclude, that there ought to

be no such thing practised by parents,—that children should not be trained up in the belief of a set of principles, but left entirely to their own judgment when they advance in years.

But is not this to contradict the express commands of our own great Legislator? "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The judgment which God makes of Abraham is recorded to his honour: "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." And the fatal consequence of a neglect of this duty is laid before us by the wise man: "The rod and reproof give wisdom; but a child left to himself, bringeth his mother to shame." And is it not to disobey the voice of nature, with respect to the common principles of religion which are discoverable by this light? Yea, it might be easily proved, that, according to this way of reasoning, parents should bestow no care upon their children, in order to form their minds to virtue and knowledge, nor give them any part of a polite education: which were to debase mankind into the condition of brutes; and, in order to prevent prejudices and prepossessions, destroy thought, and extinguish reason.

So that our adversaries who make this objection against Confessions, seem to imitate the method of the Stoics. As these did not regulate the passions, and render them useful, but endeavoured to root them up; so they, in order to secure an impartial judgment, and prevent the inconveniences which Christianity might suffer from the vast superiority of numbers on the side of its enemies, were this use of Creeds and Articles of Faith allowed to mankind, would persuade us into measures which overturn all religion, and make the plainest duties of it of none effect.

There are such things as truth and orthodoxy in the world; and it were extremely absurd to fancy, that such societies as may have embraced them, should be deprived of the just and necessary means of preserving them pure and *uncorrupted*, and robbed of what we have proved to be the

natural right of all Churches, and upon the exercise of which they may think the success and design of the ministry do in a great measure depend, because those who have erred from the truth, may abuse such composures as Confessions are to bad purposes, and a corrupt Church may thereby endeavour to maintain the mistakes and heresies which they have fallen into.

It is extremely hard, sometimes, to determine which is the most prudent and ready way to promote religion, and bring over a people who are *strangers to the commonwealth of Israel*, and what measures will prove least hazardous to the interest of Christianity. But this, methinks, may be received as a maxim,—That prudence, and dexterity, and politics, can only find place in things which are otherwise indifferent; they can never furnish objections against the dictates of conscience, and the reason of the thing. Whatever Church, therefore, is persuaded, that they are obliged, by the laws of God and nature, “to try the spirits” to which they hearken, and to have some tolerable assurance, that those persons are possessed of the necessary qualities for that office who are received as their spiritual rulers, and particularly that they should know whether their doctrine be of God;—and if that Church also be convinced, that without an assent given by him to such and such articles of faith in plain and determinate words, and, as at present things obtain in the world, in other than precisely Scriptural phrases, there can be no just satisfaction had as to their religious principles;—and that a subscription to such a Confession is the best or the only way to manifest the purity of their faith, and distinguish them from heretics,—in all which that Church would, as we hope has been proved, think very right—it is plain, that no alleged inconveniences to religion and learning must dissuade her from adhering to Confessions, which she may securely do, and leave the event of things to the overruling providence of the infinitely wise and good Governor of the world.

In the next place,—Notwithstanding of the authority which our Church gives her Confession, since *it is not made a term of Christian communion, or a qualification for any civil post*, it is evident, that our practice can, at the utmost,

be alleged to have a bad influence upon ecclesiastical officers only, and prove a hindrance of new discoveries in Theology only by them: for the laity, as they are usually called, are left at a perfect liberty to improve it;—they may contribute to the highest advances in religion,—make what progress they can in the search of truth,—reform what is amiss in religion,—rectify the notions of Christians, and manifest the falsehood and uncertainty of the established articles of faith, without the smallest restraint or bias upon their impartial understandings, from the fear of temporal disadvantages did they recede from the standard of public orthodoxy. And methinks with us we shall believe it no inconvenience to Christianity, if the ministers of the Church who receive maintenance from it, bestow their labours in the defence and improvement of the principles of the Reformation—what we think the faith of the Gospel; and continue to do so, till we be persuaded, that there are better, and more agreeable to the Word of God, to be embraced in their stead; while the other members of the Church will furnish out enow of free-thinkers, for the discovery of new truths, and the forming Christianity on a newer and better model.

I should be glad these gentlemen who are so extremely zealous that all public teachers may enjoy the same liberty possessed by themselves, whose understandings are not fettered and prejudiced by human Confessions, would give the world an experimental argument of the great advantage such an unrestrained licence would be to the Church, by their new discoveries of truth, and uncommon progress in learning; and not afford occasion of observing, that the most part of these adventurers, produce nothing but airy schemes that have no foundation in Scripture or Reason,—speculations and conjectures which tend more to swell them with vanity and conceit of their own fancies, and to disorder the imaginations of mankind, than either to reform the lives, or enlighten the understandings of Christians with solid and useful knowledge; and that as great improvements have been made in all the parts of learning which have any relation to Divinity by those who were fully convinced of the advantage and justice of Confessions, as by any of their opposers.

But it will be perhaps a more solid and serious argument, that religion and learning cannot easily suffer so much damage as is apprehended from the authority of Confessions, and their being made a term of ministerial communion by the Churches of Christ,—that though the loss of the public benefice, and the fear of any other disadvantages which attend a departure from the standard of orthodoxy, may possibly prevail with some to conceal what they think truth, and smother those discoveries which they would have communicated to the world, had the shackles of human creeds been knocked off them; yet they can have this effect only upon mean and cowardly spirits, that are void of true piety, and more under the slavish dominion of their ease and pleasures than the power of an immortal life.

They will have no influence upon good men, who have devoted themselves to the glory of God and the honour of religion. These, though possessed of a stipend, which none can enjoy but those who adhere to the established Confessions, or continue in that faith which is embraced by their congregations, will be ready to entertain with joy any new light that may irradiate their souls. As they value advances in the knowledge of the Son of God more than an increase of their treasures, and discern a beauty in truth superior to the charms of this world, the rays of it will shine in upon them with too strong and permanent a brightness to be overclouded by all the vapours and mists which can arise from their temporalities. As they will never subscribe a Confession, but when persuaded in their consciences of the conformity of its articles to Divine Revelation; so they will with courage oppose themselves to it when convinced of their error: they will not be afraid openly to abandon it, and will prove as zealous in promoting what they now see to be the mind of God in the Scriptures, as if there had never been such a thing as a human Creed in the world. So that our practice as to Confessions will prevent no new discoveries of truth, nor any improvement in knowledge, by persons endued with these noble qualities; nor will it in the least hinder the diffusing of that light through the world, since, according to the principles laid down in the beginning, there is no persecution allowed, nor any forcible methods to

hinder the preaching of the truths which may be discovered, and recommending them by all the strength of Scripture and Reason.

Now it is men only of this temper and disposition that are fit to discover truth, and rectify abuses; it is from them only that the world can expect a reformation of Churches which may have departed from the faith of the Gospel, and polluted their Creeds by an impure mixture of error; and it is by their labours that light and purity can expect to make conquests in the minds of men, and prevail over inveterate delusions. Men who are thus sincerely devoted to God, and prefer heaven to this world, will make the most impartial searches into truth; and having their minds purified from the baser passions, which govern others, and raised above the airy phantoms of greatness, and riches, and popular applause, their understandings will be freer from prejudices of every kind,—their inquiries will be more modest, sincere, and diligent,—the heavenly light of pure doctrine will make the easiest passage, and find the best entertainment from spirits, whose tempers and affections are so suited to the nature and condition of those superior regions of glory and purity. And as such will be in a peculiar manner disposed to grow in the knowledge of God, and improve in solid and useful theological learning; so they will be animated by the warmest concern for the interests of truth, whenever they perceive it, and with the most vigorous zeal will contend for it, and diffuse the rays of that light which God has caused to shine into their souls. And what prejudice can the hitherto unanimous practice of the Reformed Churches as to their Confessions do to learning? or how does it tend to prevent the most useful and important discoveries, when it will not in the least influence any that can be made by the persons we have now mentioned?

It was by men of such disinterested and heroic spirits that ever religion gained any thing in the world. The holy apostles and primitive Christians were of this temper, and animated by these generous and exalted principles; and thus they were fitted for the defence and propagation of the Gospel. The greatest temporal losses did not make them smother the *truth*; nor could the terrors of blood and violence hinder

them to proclaim aloud the tidings of salvation : persecution only put an edge on their heavenly zeal, and enabled them with the greater joy and triumph to surmount the most formidable difficulties.

Such also God employed at the Reformation to revive the decayed interests of religion, and rectify the disorders that had spread themselves through all the parts of the Romish religion. Our fathers were of a brave disinterested spirit; their souls were connaturalized unto Divine things, and under the power of another world; and therefore, when the light of the Reformation, that *day-spring from on high*, overshadowed them, the influence of corrupted Creeds—the canons of Councils, and the decrees of Popes—the loss of temporalities—and the cruelty of the severest persecution, did not prevent their abandoning the Church of Rome, and promoting the blessed change with the most vigorous zeal.

Truth and religion flourished under all these disadvantages. The apostles indeed had reason to complain of their sufferings for righteousness' sake—the murdering and torturing them for differing from the Empire in their sentiments being a manifest encroachment upon the liberties of mankind, and a persecution altogether unjustifiable; but then where did they ever pretend to the emoluments of the heathen priests, or grasp at the revenues of the Temples? Did they imagine, that the Pagans, before they were converted, should take away the revenues from their own priests, and bestow them upon the Christian ministers? or did they insinuate, that it was a loss to religion and learning that so self-contradictory a scheme did not obtain? They thought indeed, that *they who served at the altar should live by the altar*; but did they expect that persons were to set bread upon that altar who did not worship at it? No; they knew that men must first be converted to Christianity before they heaped favours upon the teachers of it.

Let us see how forcible this objection is with respect to the pretended losses which religion and learning may sustain from the restraints which Confessions lay upon ecclesiastical officers. Why, they may hinder the world from obtaining new discoveries in Divinity from men of narrow covetous spirits, who prefer a stipend to light and purity—whose

souls are so possessed by the basest and most inglorious passions, timorousness, and worldly-mindedness, that, rather than be exposed to temporal inconveniences, they will counteract their consciences, stifle truth, and profess with the mouth what they abhor in their souls. By this means, perhaps, a stop may be put to alterations in an Established Creed, by men who have not the courage to declare their principles, nor dare oppose the majority, but, it seems, look upon temporalities to be the most persuasive motives, and never design to stand it out against so strong an argument.

How unlikely is it that such men would ever be serviceable to religion, were there no manner of restraints, even not that of Confessions, upon them? or that the changes they would make would be in favour of truth? They seem utterly unfit subjects for the purified light of faith, and not at all calculated, either to receive it themselves, or convey it into the world; and upon such error and heresy were much more ready to make an impression.

With what scorn, then, and contempt, may Christianity look down upon the proffers of such unworthy and insignificant votaries? how small advantage can truth ever expect from their discoveries? and how little need we be disgusted at the use of Confessions, though, whenever a Church is so unhappy as to be plagued with such ministers, those Confessions may be an argument with them, to keep their discoveries to themselves, and not enlighten the world with them?

I am sure it is incomparably more probable, that any unjustifiable restraints upon these men will rather prevent the discovery of error (if we may use the phrase) than of truth. There are very powerful arguments, with people of some tempers, besides the love of a reformation, which may engage them to depart from the public standard, and publish schemes of their own. A natural levity and inconstancy of mind, that cannot remain long fixed upon any thing,—a warmth of imagination, and sprightliness of fancy, which will be fruitful of new discoveries that others have not attended to,—a fond conceit of one's self, and a notion that *we are wiser and more clear-sighted than our neighbours,—*

a contempt of what is commonly received, and an ambition to distinguish ourselves from the inferior part of mankind, who have not such a freedom and elevation of mind as we have,—the glory which a new scheme furnishes to its author, if it happen to take in the world,—and the applauses and homage which are paid by his admirers to the head of a successful party—are all plentiful sources from which unknown hypotheses and new improvements in Divinity may overflow the world.

From these motives, it is very likely, that any new discoveries, and alterations in the received faith or worship, would be made by the men we have described ; and therefore, had we no other use for Confessions, a regard to truth, and to the peace of society, would make us value them as means of curbing the passions, and stopping up such impure streams as must spring from so corrupt a fountain, and will much more probably poison the minds of men, than refresh and nourish them.

There remains one consideration, which, we hope, will be a full and clear answer to the objection. When it is brought as an argument to persuade any Church to lay aside the use of Confessions, that such restraints are a great hindrance to farther advances in knowledge, and are accompanied with mighty prejudices to religion and learning, such things will be understood as that Church will think real prejudices ; and the discoveries which would otherwise be made must be such as the society will value and desire to promote ; otherwise the preventing them can never be urged with them as an argument against their Confessions.

But now we are, what every Church must necessarily be with respect to their own standard, fully convinced, that religion and learning can no wise be so well promoted as by a conformity to our Confession, and by men who maintain the principles which it teaches ; and that, so far as any deviate from them, they wander out of the paths of true knowledge, and it becomes the more improbable that Christian learning can be improved by their labours.

Our Confessions cannot be alleged to have the least bad influence upon the highest advances in studies agreeable to them. They do not lay the smallest restraint upon ministers

to explain the Scriptures with greater force and evidence, to discover new arguments, whereby the truth may be vindicated with the greatest dexterity, and the doctrines and commands of Christianity recommended to the faith and practice of mankind, in their brightest glory and loveliest excellency. They may be as knowing in the original languages, ancient customs, ecclesiastical history, and all other parts of Theological learning, and improve them to as great advantage, as they are able. They may reason with as much closeness and perspicuity, and be as cautious to use a weak uncertain argument as they desire. They may fall upon the newest and best ways of answering objections, and putting an end to controversies in the most ingenious and clear manner : and in all these things, a man is at perfect liberty, without any bias from the authority of Creeds, to go beyond his neighbours, and excel the rest of the Church.

No disadvantage is done to any new discoveries, except those that may be designed for the defence and propagation of doctrines contrary to the public standard. Now it is plain, so long as any society remains convinced of the truth thereof, they must look upon all such discoveries to be directly contrary to the interest of religion, or to the growth of true and solid learning ; and all the seeming learning and labours which tend this way, must be thought by them steps towards real ignorance, and so far an extinguishing the light of truth.

I may admire the works of those from whom I differ in other respects, and acknowledge the great benefits that our common religion may receive from their studies ; but so long as I am, for example, what the world calls a Calvinist, and in my conscience fully convinced of the Divine original of the principles which distinguish that party, I cannot help believing, that those labours which are designed to oppose Calvinism, must be in so far opposite to truth and knowledge, and that they can only tend to improve learning, falsely so called, to the growth of what the Apostle names *philosophy and vain deceit*.

And while this is the view which a Church has of things, must she not think that the restraints of her Confessions *are the surest means to promote true and valuable learning,*

instead of being a hindrance to it? And is it not a palpable absurdity, to suppose the objection of our adversaries should be of any weight with her, when she is convinced that a contrary management would only tend to discover to the world new arts of sophistry, and fill it with perverse disputers endued with more cunning and subtlety, and that the thing encouraged thereby would be the learning of the man described by the Apostle, 1 Tim. vi. 3-5—"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth"?

It is true, that we do not reckon it impossible, but that discoveries of some truths may be made, not only new, but contrary to some of our present principles; for we do not fancy that we are infallible, and absolutely secured from mistakes. But then we can only think, that an opinion of an adversary may possibly be true, while, at present at least, it appears highly probable that it is false; whereas we think it in the last degree probable, that the contrary sentiment is true, and only possible that it may be false; in which case, I think it evident, that we must be determined more by the probability, than by the bare possibility, and accordingly think that sound Christian learning will be in the likeliest way to increase when that principle is adhered to.

(4.) There remains now only one objection against Confessions, to be considered,—namely, the disturbances and animosities they occasion in the world, and the great disadvantage they are to peace and charity. "For these books," says an author of that side (Le Clerc), "have hitherto been the origin and nurse of so many strifes, alterations, quarrels, railings, contentions, animosities, bitter-nesses, reproaches, condemnations, and horrible distractions—which will never be wanting to the Church, while the authority of these book-writers endures."

What we have represented upon the last argument, may in a great measure be applied to this objection also; and

therefore a very few observations upon it will be sufficient to answer it.

In the first place, it may, we believe, without presumption, be affirmed, that any mischiefs and disorders which can be laid to the charge of Confessions have been almost wholly owing to the abuse of them, and their having been built upon wrong foundations, and enforced with unjustifiable arguments.

It was when Creeds claimed an absolute submission and implicit faith,—when they were edged with the sword, and carried along with them blood and torture, that they became very dangerous tools and fatal to the peace of mankind. Consult the history of the Church in all ages, and it will be found, that persecution, and an invasion upon the rights of others,—a humour of imposing the faith of the prevailing party upon the minority, and enforcing this invasion on the consciences of Christians, by fines, imprisonments, and death itself, were the springs of all the evils complained of.

But does this in the least affect that authority of Confessions, which, as we have proved, is perfectly consistent with all the most extended rights of a rational creature, and takes its rise from the inalienable and fundamental privileges of all societies? Is it an objection against Creeds which are recommended by none but equitable and rational arguments, and are not urged upon others against their consciences, nor are attended by the dreadful train of deaths and tortures, which contain the sting and poison of the Papal decrees, and, if they be taken away, afford an easy access to reap the sweets and advantages of Confessions, without the alleged hazards?

The uncharitable heats, bitter invectives, and calumnious misrepresentations of persons and things, which are too oft to be found amongst contending parties, with all the other melancholy fruits of division which disquiet mankind, and disturb their peace and happiness, are not owing to a vigorous zeal for those doctrines which appear to be according to truth and godliness, nor to a high esteem and steady adherence to our principles concerning Creeds; but they are to be entirely attributed to the unsanctified passions of mankind, and those affections and inclinations which have not been *purified* by the grace of God, nor brought under the obe-

dience of the Gospel,—our pride and vanity, and worldly-mindedness, fondness of applause, esteem of our own schemes and performances, and all the other branches of self-love,

It is these that raise all the storms which toss about mankind, and have broken the harmony of societies, and the peace of families;—these have blown up the coals of contention, and fed the flames which have so long devoured the world. These corrupt unbroken hearts of ours make us so impatient of contradiction,—so sensibly touched with the least opposition to our opinions, which we vainly fancy everybody should be as fond of as ourselves,—and so eagerly bent upon methods of revenging the supposed injury done to our judgment. Hence men become so fierce and imperious, so little tender of their fellow-creatures that may differ from them, and so violent in all their measures,—abandoned to anger, resentments, hatreds; and hence we are so ready to pass a rash and censorious judgment concerning the motives and ends of those who think otherwise than we do, to excommunicate, and, it may be, damn them, and, while they live, to treat them as our enemies. *Whence, says the Apostle, come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?*

If these passions were mortified, and men would subdue their own spirits,—if we would form the temper of our souls upon the model of Christianity, and practise those noble virtues which are the distinguishing ornaments of our religion,—all those mischiefs would soon have an end, and we would then see what had been the true cause of all our disorders. Make a man humble and modest,—convince him of the weakness of mankind,—and the narrowness of human understanding,—purify him from pride, and vain-glory, and self-love,—and engage him to imitate the meekness and lowliness of the blessed Jesus, and then all his life and actions will breathe peace, and love, and charity, and he will make the world and the Church happy.

But if this be not done, it is in vain to fancy that this or the other scheme of principles will procure quiet and harmony to societies. It is unacquaintedness with human nature, and the true springs of our misfortunes, which makes people imagine that the running down Confessions of Faith,

- and the exposing all composures of this nature to contempt, will ever do the business. These passions would lose none of their fury, and would prove as outrageous, in the breasts of those that were for no restraints of this kind, as in those of any other. We should see, and we actually have seen, a vain and proud free-thinker as fond of his own notions, as imperious, and as uncharitable, as the most zealous promoter of orthodoxy; his passions as ready to boil over, and inflame societies to their utter distraction, and the ruin of their peace. These corruptions, seated in the heart, will always find some vent to break out at; and if they do not exert themselves about religious matters, they will do it in a way equally disadvantageous to the world.

There can be, therefore, no colour of reason in this objection, except it could be proved, that the principles which we have endeavoured to vindicate with respect to Confessions are inconsistent with the graces of the Christian life, which are beautified with so incomparable charms, and would render the world so happy, did they prevail in it.

But what pretence is there for such an allegation? May not moderation and meekness in the management of a cause be reconciled with the most unshaken steadiness? And are not the warmest zeal for the faith of the Gospel, and the most vigorous efforts in contending for it, consistent with a love to the souls of men,—a most compassionate concern for their errors and backslidings,—and sincere endeavours to reclaim them, managed with all the winning arts of modesty, humility, and diffidence of one's self, and a deference for our neighbour? May I not manifest all the beauties of the most perfect charity and goodwill, and all the charms of patience, self-denial, candour, and ingenuity, with respect to a man whom I cannot make choice of for my minister, or perhaps admit into Christian communion, till he give some reasonable assurance that he is a disciple of Jesus, and has embraced the faith once delivered to the saints? since I may exercise all these graces towards persons, concerning whom, I am persuaded, that they never were Christians, or that they have departed from the truth, and ought to show all gentleness to all men, heathens and publicans, if we may thereby *reclaim them*, and bring them to the knowledge of the truth.

These are the principal objections which, we conceive, can be brought against Confessions, as they are embraced and made use of by all the Reformed Churches, and particularly the Church of Scotland; and we flatter ourselves, that so full and plain answers have been made to them, that it will be easy for the reader, by the help of them, to discover the weakness of any other cavils of the same nature, which are so vainly boasted of by adversaries.

Having thus finished what relates to the arguments against Creeds, and vindicated their equity, usefulness, and necessity, it remains only, that, in a few words, we represent some things which impress us with the most hearty concern in this affair, make us look upon the question as a matter of great importance, and animate us with a warm zeal and activity in espousing what appears to us the better side.

The near connection which the question concerning Confessions has with the doctrines of Revelation, and the great influence they have upon them,—their appearing one very proper, if not absolutely necessary, mean to preserve these in their purity, and to manifest our high esteem and cordial acceptance of them,—repeated experiences, that the clamour and contempt which Articles of Faith and Creeds have of late been exposed to, have almost always proceeded from a coldness of affection to the truths of the Gospel, and an indifference as to matters of faith,—and the visible tendency which they have to lessen that steady concern and great value for the doctrines of Christianity, which should possess the breast of every one who pretends to be a follower of Jesus, and to reduce us to the degenerate and hateful temper of Laodicea—join together in touching us after a most sensible manner, when we reflect on this subject, and naturally intermix the regard for the Truth itself, with our esteem for Confessions, so necessary to secure it.

And is religion reduced to so low an ebb, and the impressions of the great God and our blessed Saviour so far razed out of the minds of mankind, that they can, with easiness of thought, behold a flood of errors breaking down all the boundaries of truth,—the most sacred mysteries of godliness impudently denied and impugned,—and the distin-

guishing doctrines of Christianity—whereby it is exalted above the darkness of Paganism and the follies of Mahomet—treacherously undermined, subtilized into an airy phantom, or at least doubted, if not disclaimed? All which must be borne with, as little differences in opinion, that ought not to diminish our esteem and affection to the maintainers of them,—should not interrupt Christian communion, or even unfit a man for being our minister; at least we need not use the smallest caution in inquiries about his faith, or pursue the necessary means to discover it, and obtain satisfaction that he is not of the number of the grossest heretics.

We cannot but look upon such a false moderation and charity, and a pretended love of liberty, as a base forgetfulness of our duty, and the obligations we are under to our Saviour—a real betraying His honour into the hands of infidels, and ingloriously deserting or looking with a stupid unconcern upon those interests which should be dearer to us than our lives, and have a constant preference to our chiefest joys.

Where is our religion, if the doctrines of it be corrupted? Are not these the design and substance of Revelation which God blessed the world with, that He might enlighten their understandings, and purify them by that faith, discover the mysteries hid from ages and generations, and scatter the clouds which hang over the world? Are not grace and truth represented to us as the glory of the Word that was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and the design of His tabernacling with men? These doctrines are the great means of working a reformation in the souls of men, and improving them in holiness: *Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.* One of the noble advantages to be expected from that glory and happiness of the Gospel state—the mission of the Holy Spirit—was, that he will guide us into all truth. This is what the great Apostle of the Gentiles wishes so earnestly in behalf of the Colossians, that they might attain unto *all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, in the knowledge of the mystery of God, even of the Father, and of Christ.* How pathetically *are we exhorted, to hold fast the profession of our faith*

without wavering, for he is faithful that hath promised,—to hold the mystery of faith in a pure conscience,—and to continue grounded and settled in the faith, and unmoved from the hope of the Gospel, which we have heard? And is not, through the whole Scriptures, a departure from the faith represented as an apostasy from Christianity, and destructive of the souls of men? Upon them that receive not the love of the truth, God will send strong delusions, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believe not the truth. And what can be more plain and explicit than the words of the Apostle?—Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the DOCTRINE OF CHRIST, HATH NOT GOD: he that abideth in the DOCTRINE of Christ, he hath both the FATHER AND THE SON. It were easy to add innumerable more places to the same purpose.

With what horror, then, amazement, and grief of soul, must we look upon the apostasy of these latter times, and the fatal success with which the old serpent beguiles foolish men, and spreads his hellish conquests over their minds, to the destruction of truth and godliness? Can we remember that we are Christians, and behold with unconcern the mists and darkness of these infernal regions overclouding the light of the Gospel, and drawing a shadow over the Divine amiableness and beauty of Truth? so many madmen, who love to breathe this impure air, and suck in with greediness these loathsome poisonous vapours of error and blindness?

Must it not fetch up a groan from our hearts swelled with sorrow, and draw down tears from our eyes, that proud vain men should dare to profane the most sacred mysteries, and insolently vilify the eternal truths to which the Son of God bare witness?—that monstrous heresies should be entertained by poor impious creatures, who have no pity upon their own souls, but willingly fall into the snare of the devil, and offer so pleasing a sacrifice as a cheated, murdered soul is to his hellish malice?—and that others who profess the truth should behave with an inglorious neutrality, as if they were no wise concerned in the matter, and the honour of a Redeemer, and his Gospel, might without a struggle be abandoned?—and, with an equal perfidiousness as if they openly deserted the

Captain of salvation, the treasures of wisdom and knowledge laid up in him are undervalued, as mere speculations, and disputable questions, concerning intricate, if not unintelligible, points!

Is this the treatment we give to that excellent Revelation, and the return made to the kindness of our Friend? Is this all the influence which the love of God, and the compassions of a Saviour, have on us?—the expiring sighs and groans, and the dying blood, of Him who suffered that he might *give a testimony to the truth, and bring us from darkness unto light*? Do we give so cold an acceptance, and lend so insensible an ear, to the joyful sound, which has come down from heaven, and carries along with it divine pleasures and blessings to a people that know it, and are directed thereby to walk in the light of God's countenance, and to rejoice in His name all the day? Is this the entertainment we give to the most important truths, flowing from the mouth of the greatest Prophet,—endeared to us by the most moving and affectionate arguments,—and supported by the strongest evidence; truths that are beautified by the lustre of an eternal excellency, and surrounded with the characters of ineffable wisdom and knowledge,—that faith of the Gospel, and those mysteries of man's redemption, which are the result of Divine counsels, and the glory of an infinite understanding—are gazed at with wonder and delight, and looked into with the curious eye of the most exalted angel,—which furnish matter for the eternal contemplation of heaven, and the loud unwearied songs of numberless crowds of adoring, admiring seraphs?

Are the Gospel of Christ, and the Truth he bore witness to, received with so much esteem, affection, and wonder, in heaven; and yet despised, corrupted, or undervalued, upon earth, by men for whose salvation this Gospel is designed,—to whom it discovers life and immortality,—and opens such an amazing scene of triumphing love, and victorious grace, and of all the mighty things that heaven and hell mean; as if there were a small difference betwixt this admirable and harmonious contrivance,—that Divine system of the brightest, and wisest, and most momentous doctrines,—and the confused heap of deformed errors, and monstrous heresies; and

as if it were but a matter of trifling speculation, whether the purity and light of heaven, or the clouds and the smoke of the sulphurous and fiery lake, possess the hearts of men, and whether the kingdom of darkness, or that of the Son of God, prevail in the world?

But, ah! an increased horror seizes upon our spirits, and astonishment is added to our thought, that such hideous and loathsome productions of hell should take root in these parts of the world which God hath blessed with the noblest discoveries of the Gospel, and the clearest and most certain knowledge of the kingdom of his dear Son, and hath wrought so amazing things to deliver them from the ignorance of Paganism, and the tyrannical blindness of Popery; and yet that any of us, ungrateful to God our Saviour, and stupid to our plainest interests, should be so laboriously employed to form a covering of thick darkness and error, whereby we may hinder those rays of eternal light which are diffused in such plenty, and darted down so strong and direct by that glorious Sun, from touching our eyes, and irradiating our souls.

When so dismal a state of things presents itself to our view, can those who retain any love for their Saviour, and value for Divine Revelation, without blushing, neglect any opportunity whereby they may profess their adherence to the sacred truths of the Gospel, and declare to all the world, as loudly as they can, their inviolable esteem and veneration for these adorable mysteries,—may manifest the warmest zeal for their honour, and act with an undaunted courage in their defence?—and may show with how vigorous an affection that pure light is received into their souls, and that a regard for the glory of their Redeemer, and the doctrines of his grace, is stronger than their other passions, and superior to the most dazzling charms of this world, and the most alluring temptations of life? Then, especially, they should “hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering, for he is faithful that hath promised;” and “profess a good profession before many witnesses;” and then “they should separate betwixt the clean and the unclean,” flee away from the tabernacles of the ungodly and perverse men, and “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.”

Every word that proceedeth from the mouth of the great

Prophet of the Church, or the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, merits our belief and regard; but no doubt our esteem and zeal should rise in proportion to the nature and importance of the doctrines. When the great foundations of Christianity are undermined,—when the person, offices, and work of the Messiah, are robbed of their glory, openly denied, and treated with scorn, or debased as indifferent and inconsiderable,—when the return made to the Author of the great salvation is the impugning of his Divinity, and, because he took on him the form of a servant, the sacrilegious detracting from his equality with God,—and, “when false teachers do privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them”—then our zeal should be invigorated, and flow out with a higher tide of affection; then we should be *valiant for the truth*, and stand up for the glory of our Master against open enemies and traitorous renegades; we should then make the plainest declarations of our own faith, account it inglorious to languish and give back in such a cause, to skulk behind the covert of ambiguous words, and, as if we were mediators betwixt God and his insolent adversaries, with a detestable lukewarmness, to set up for reconciling schemes, whereby a confederacy may be entered into betwixt light and darkness, God and Belial. No; let us then with open candour declare ourselves on the Lord’s side, and, “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel; in nothing terrified by our adversaries.” Then is the proper time to be influenced by what our Saviour tells us, “Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels.” “Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.”

And what momentous arguments have we to stir us up to all this, and to put life and constancy in our endeavours! All the mighty powers of eternal loving-kindness,—that love of God which sent his Son into the world to save us, and enlighten our souls with these heavenly doctrines,—all the wonders of mercy, and the triumphs of a dying Redeemer’s grace, with an united force, flow into our hearts, and conspire to warm our affections, and animate our passions with

a heavenly flame in the cause of our Saviour. The native beauty and simplicity of the Gospel truths, surrounded with all the glories of our Saviour's death and love, attended with the highest powers of duty, and gratitude, and generosity, and testified to by the loudest applauses of heavenly hosts, can never fail to furnish an endless train, and an irresistible force of motives. Can there be a breast in which they will fail to make an impression?

Behold yonder our exalted Lord looking down from His throne, to encourage and enliven us. He is expecting what we will do for His honour, and how our bowels are moved within us. He points out His blood and wounds which saved us from everlasting death; the cross which he endured, and the shame he despised, to make us happy; the scorn of the multitude, the rage and hatred of the learned, the madness and blindness of the rulers of this world, yea, the hellish efforts and hissings of the infernal hosts, which could never shake His resolution, or make Him desert our cause. He represents to our view the light and joy of a reconciled God, and the eternal pleasures of the sanctuary of immortality, all the fruits of His purchase; and He makes bare His glorious arm, that arm which pulled us out of hell, and drove back the devouring flames: and He looks to see, after such an amazing and delightful prospect, what return we will make to Him; if it be possible for us to look on and see Him robbed of His glory and majesty, his Deity vilified, and His truths and cause given up and betrayed. And were there any use for terrors in so affectionate an argument, He presents the fearful end of apostates and deserters from the armies of Israel, while at the same time He allures us with as great encouragements to fidelity: "It is a faithful saying:—For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:—if we suffer, we shall also reign with him:—if we deny him, he also will deny us:—if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful:—he cannot deny himself."

Let these things arm us with an invincible resolution, and inspire us with a generous warmth for the glory and interests of our blessed Master; let us never count any thing too dear whereby we may honour Him in a declining age, and in the midst of a perverse world; and let the passions of a holy

indignation and zeal exert themselves, with a growing vigour and affection; let us never be frightened or enticed away from Him, or beguiled with fair pretences of cunning deceivers; but, with an equal fortitude and sincerity, let us shew a just disdain for that laughter and wit which profane the mysteries of religion, a contempt for that learning and those accomplishments which are made engines to overturn our Saviour's throne, and for the arrogance and self-sufficiency of proud, imperious heretics. Let us never be shaken by the authority of great names, or a regard to our friends and our party, or by the undervaluing thoughts and the frowns of the rich and the great, nor be cooled by their indifference in that cause. Let us shew, that the side of our God and Saviour is the party to which we will sacrifice all other interests and persons; that however learned and knowing some men may be,—however much we formerly respected and loved them,—whatever obligations we thought ourselves under to their useful labours in matters (though of just concern to us) of infinitely less moment,—that all these can never make us forget our Master; that His blood and death are stronger ties upon our souls, and have a higher claim to our endeavours; and that whenever they come in competition with His dignity and glory, we will make no scruple to expose to public contempt the reputation and learning of such men; yea, “though they were angels from heaven, to reckon them accursed.”

And let us never be seized by cowardice and sloth, though recommended by the names of *charity*, and *peace*, and *liberty*, and *prudence*: but may we abhor that pretended charity which cannot subsist without the ruins of the noblest part of true charity, a fervent love to God; and let us never think our ease, and esteem, and party, and politics, and life itself, when compounded into one, too costly a sacrifice for the Deity of Christ, and the defence of the truth, but offer it with cheerfulness and joy.

But we must always be careful to govern our zeal for the truth by the laws of the Gospel, and to animate our opposition to heretics by the meek and lowly spirit of Jesus Christ; and this will manifest the purity of our affections, and that it is a disinterested love to our Saviour, and value for the

knowledge of the Son of God, and not pride and vanity, nor an imposing uncharitable temper, which move us.

Let us therefore, by our whole conduct, even to backsliders and to infidels, show how passionately we love their souls,—with what a tender compassion their wilful errors, and hardened obstinacy, affect us,—with what pleasure we would contribute to their recovery, and to their true happiness,—and with what open arms we would joyfully receive them, did they return to the faith of the Gospel.

By these methods we shall show ourselves valiant soldiers of Christ, and worthy of the name we bear ; and in this way we shall give acceptable obedience to the important injunctions of our religion,—“to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints ;” “to hold fast the form of sound words which we have heard, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus ;” and yet, being moved with a *zeal according to knowledge*, to be “gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves ; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.”

We may meet with discouragements in a world where darkness and error so much prevail ; we may be exposed to the hatred, disesteem, and derision, of vain scornful men ; and it cannot fail to fill our hearts with grief, and embitter our lives, when we see the most precious truths vilified and trampled on by the enemies to the cross of Christ, and heresy spreading its contagion. This will make us sigh out, “Woe is me that we should inhabit the lands of Mesech, and dwell in the tents of Kedar !” But let us think upon the Master whom we own, and the excellency of the cause which we espouse ; let us raise up our longing eyes to the dawn of the everlasting day, and to those native regions of light and purity, where truth ever appears in its eternal charms, and the mysteries of salvation are admired and gazed at with the most affectionate wonder,—which is animated by the divine beauty and excellency,—where the loveliness, and harmony, and importance of them, are never disputed, and they are set in too bright a light for any inhabitant to fancy that they are intricacies of speculation, and not far different from the opposite errors ; and let us raise our en-

larged thoughts to the expectation of that mighty day when our earnest contention for the truth will meet with the loud applause of myriads of angels, while eternal shame and hissings will accompany the ignorant despisers of the faith of the Gospel.

It may perhaps be thought, that on this head the person and the manner of the writer have been often changed, and that the accuracy of method is neglected; but a sincere concern for the souls of men, and a grief of heart for the unhappy state of religion among us, could not easily keep to artificial rules in venting themselves.

We are indeed confidently told, that it is no great matter what a man believes; if so be he is endued with sincerity, and has a holy practice. "I never yet could see (says an often-quoted author) a list of fundamentals in Christianity. . . . That only, in my notion, is a fundamental mistake in religion, which is inconsistent with a good heart, and a religious conversation." We hope we shall always put the highest value upon a holy life; but to suppose there is nothing of importance in religion, besides that sobriety and goodness which at least other men can judge of, and that the doctrines of the Gospel may in that case be disbelieved without great hazard, is to overturn the whole scheme of Christianity. For what? has not that morality been found amongst the Heathens? and before the coming of our Saviour, the moral law, which governed practice, was promulgated by God himself; and therefore the doctrines of religion are the distinguishing glories of Christianity, and its excellency above the Mosaic economy: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

Besides, those truths which are the objects of our faith, are not mysteries of speculation, but designed to promote holiness in the lives, and to purify the hearts, of Christians; they are *a doctrine according to godliness*; and as the Apostle speaks to the Colossians, "The word of the truth of the gospel, which is come unto them, as it is in all the world, bringeth forth fruit; as it did also in them, since the day *they heard* of it, and knew the grace of God in truth." These

great articles of our faith, concerning the satisfaction and righteousness of the Messiah,—the imperfection and insufficiency of all our performances,—and the grace and love of our Redeemer, are all calculated to add force to the law, and both exalt and invigorate our obedience.

Our obedience is a rational one; all the parts of the holy life must, as well as zeal, be *according to knowledge*; and therefore it is in vain to pretend to real purity of heart or life, without a belief of the truth. But in so far as error clouds the understanding, a corruption of manners will sully the conversation; especially with respect to the noblest part of religion—those acts of it which have a regard to God. How is it possible that the man can be really good, who is constantly offering the highest affronts to his Maker, and, by a disbelief of the plain and important articles of faith, is loudly proclaiming him a liar? “He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God, hath made him a LIAR, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.” Nor can we separate what God has joined as the necessary means of our eternal happiness: “Because God,” saith the Apostle to the Thessalonians, “hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT, AND BELIEF OF THE TRUTH.”

When, therefore, we reflect on the foregoing, and innumerable other considerations, to endear the truths of God to our souls, and awaken our zeal for them, how can we possibly look on those as our brethren in the Lord, who have denied him? or receive such as are suspected of heresies, and decline to give a *reason of the hope that is in them*, into the communion of the Church, when, besides the nature of the thing, and the purity which God requires in all the societies of His people, we could never reconcile such a practice with an honour for truth, and the express declarations of the Gospel? “For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God: Wherefore come out from among them, and be

ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you."

And how much less can we submit to a man as our minister, who has erred in any important point, and refuses to give a clear and full declaration of his orthodoxy? for which purpose we have proved, that Creeds and Confessions are absolutely necessary. What a grief and disturbance of soul must possess us, and with what horror must we be seized, if we should have no assurance, but that in going to the temple of God, instead of the light of heaven, we should have the clouds and mists of error overshadowing us from the pulpit!—that our attendance upon ordinances dispensed by him, instead of promoting our salvation through the *belief of the truth*, would tend to quite contrary purposes?—and that by such a conduct we were willingly exposing ourselves to the snare of the devil, and submitting to such pastors, to whom perhaps might be applied the apostolical injunction, "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds." To prevent all which evils, we think Confessions highly useful, and upon that account retain a value for such composites.

Besides, it is represented to us in the Scriptures, as one immediate design of the institution of the sacred office, that thereby the unity of faith, and fellowship of the saints in the belief of the same principles of the common salvation, might be gradually advanced, and at length perfected: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers: for the PERFECTING THE SAINTS, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the UNITY OF THE FAITH, and of the KNOWLEDGE of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." How can this end be gained in a Church, by ministers who do not themselves maintain the *unity of the faith*, but patronise diversities of opinions, even in matters of importance? and how can we be answerable to God and our consciences, if due care be not taken of this matter, nor the

proper means used, that in such points the Pastors of the Church all speak the same things? And I hope it is a received maxim, that *they ought to speak because they believe*; and especially that what is immediately subjoined by the Apostle be observ'd, "That henceforth we be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

It cannot also but animate our zeal and esteem for Confessions, when we consider the unhappy effects of despising and abandoning them, and the persons who are their most furious adversaries;—that a neglect and contempt of them has been too much accompanied by a disesteem of the doctrines of salvation, and a cold indifference as to the concerns of truth;—and that, having thus frozen the spirits of mankind, and shaken loose their faith, they have laid them open to the impressions of error, and heresy makes an easy conquest of them.

It seems evident from experience, that none can raise a more noisy clamour against Confessions, and load them with greater calumnies, than the declared enemies of all Revealed Religion, and the insolent despisers of our Saviour and his Gospel. They are highly gratified by all the affronts that are poured upon Creeds; and with pleasure behold a pretended liberty and right of private judgment, the perfection and perspicuity of the Scriptures, and the Protestant principles, perverted, and artfully made use of to break down all the boundaries of truth, and bulwarks against error. This raises our esteem of these composures; and gives us ground to suspect that there must be something very good in them, and that they are very useful to the cause of Christianity, when we see Deists so angry with them, and Infidels rejoice at the prospect of their being dispossessed of their authority.

When they see persons of such a complexion so extremely zealous in this dispute, would to God that our brethren,—who, we hope, retain a sincere value for the truth, and a cordial esteem and love of our Redeemer, and the precious doctrines with which He has enlightened the world,—would seriously consider whose cause they are serving by that violent

opposition which has of late been so unreasonably made to the authority that Creeds have in all ages, and amongst all sorts of Christians, obtained in the Church; and if it will be a spring of lasting joy to them, should our scheme be baffled, and theirs prevail in the world, when their victories would only furnish matter for triumph to the whole tribe of infidels, and any beginnings of them are hailed with so loud acclamations by none so much as by the obstinate rebels against their heavenly King and Lord!

Liberty, charity, moderation, are very fine things, and great names; but as to the present application of them, and when they come from the mouths and pens of such persons, may we not prudently suspect, that they are indeed levelled at the ruin of our religion, and only gild over a deadly poison? And, to prevent the unhappy fate of Troy, should we not act with respect to them, according to the wise advice of Laocoon, which the multitude so foolishly neglected?—

“O wretched countrymen! what fury reigns?
What more than madness has possess’d your brains?
Think you the Grecians from your coasts are gone?
And are Ulysses’ arts no better known?
This hollow fabric either must enclose
Within its blind recess our secret foes;
Or, ’tis an engine raised above the town,
T’ o’erlook the walls, and then to batter down.
Somewhat is sure designed by fraud or force—
Trust not their presents, nor admit the horse.”

All the beauties and excellences of truth, the sweets and advantages of peace and union in societies, and of a fervent love, mutual esteem, and harmony among Christians, concur to impress us with very favourable notions of Confessions, which we think so well adapted to secure these blessings to a Church; as, on the other hand, the deformity and danger of heresy,—the fatal effects of a flood of errors breaking into a Church,—the grievous plague of animosities, divisions, and disputes, among the members and ministers of it, every one of them, with uncharitableness, heat, and obstinacy, propagating contradictory opinions,—and the melancholy influence such questions and speculations have on practical godliness, and the most amiable graces of the Christian life, make us look with sorrow and regret upon those schemes whereby *all restraints* of order and government are destroyed, and a

wide breach made for all these evils and calamities to enter, and both pollute the Church and lay it waste.

In the last place, we cannot omit to take notice, that a great force is added to all these considerations, from our own experience, and the sensible proofs we in the Church have enjoyed of the excellent advantages flowing from a well-regulated and duly-limited authority of Confessions;—that by the means thereof, through the blessing of God, an uncommon harmony, in what we are persuaded is the doctrine of God our Saviour, flourishes amongst us;—that religion has been preserved in its purity, and a security from errors and heresies, which greatly distract other Churches, in so great a measure obtained among us;—together with a freedom from all the melancholy effects of disputes and divisions amongst ministers, as to the established Articles of Faith, which give so great disturbance to the minds of the poor people, and put an unhappy stop to their edification and growth in grace and holiness. Of which evils, if there be any seeds amongst us big with growing mischief, they are perhaps owing wholly to the want of a just improvement of our Confession, and a vigorous maintenance of its authority: and it is with pleasure we observe, that we have no ground to suspect our ecclesiastical officers of hypocrisy, or that they do not sincerely believe those articles which they subscribe; and that all these valuable advantages to truth and holiness are gained, without any invasion upon the liberty of Christians and the right of private judgment, or any assistance of violence and persecution, or the other weapons of a carnal warfare.

3. Having now finished what we thought necessary for the defence and illustration of Confessions, there remains very little to be said concerning our own in particular. It does not in the least belong to this performance, TO VINDICATE THE TRUTH OF THE DOCTRINES ASSERTED IN THEM. Whether we or our adversaries have judged best, must depend upon the Holy Scriptures; to the determination whereof we with confidence and submission entirely refer our cause: only, since our Church has embraced the Westminster Confession as the uncorrupted faith of the Gospel, and that

every society must act according to the light of their own consciences, all that has been said may be immediately applied to the vindication of the authority which that Confession obtains amongst us, as a public standard of orthodoxy, to be subscribed by all our spiritual Pastors and Rulers.

Some may possibly be disgusted at *the length of our Confession*, and that in the number of articles it should so far exceed the Primitive Creeds; as indeed all the Reformed Confessions do. But this must be attributed to the great change of persons and circumstances,—to the vast multitude and variety of errors which prevail in the world at this time, and ought to be guarded against,—and to the subtle distinctions and artful subterfuges of heretics, under which they conceal their heterodox sentiments, and impose upon the unskilful by fair pretences, and thereby lay a necessity upon the Church to express their belief of the contrary truths in very full and conspicuous terms. And we are so far from thinking this plainness and determinateness of expression a defect, that we cannot but believe it a very great excellency of a composure, the very design whereof is to obtain a well-grounded information of the subscriber's real principles.

It may be also thought by some, that our Confession confines the office of the ministry within too narrow limits,—that the articles of it are too particular, and descend to questions of no great moment,—and that a man may be very well qualified for the sacred function, and endued with great abilities, which might enable him to be very useful and serviceable to the interests of religion and truth, and yet have a scruple as to some of the lesser points so positively determined.

We shall not deny but that possibly it may be so; we do not pretend that our Confession is carried to a pitch of unblemished perfection; and that it might not have been amended and adjusted with greater wisdom and accuracy, to all the designs of such composures. And we shall own, that there might be good men, and very useful ministers, whose labours the Church cannot enjoy, because they are not able to come up to the terms of our Confession, and may doubt

or disbelieve some of its articles. But the Westminster Assembly which framed, and our Church which established it, did, what all wise men must do, act according to the best of their judgment, and followed that way which they thought liable to fewest hazards.

And we are justly persuaded, that there is no such danger upon the one hand to religion, though a man that might prove a valuable minister (who in some lesser points thinks differently from our Confession) should be diverted from the sacred function, and apply himself to serve God and his generation in any other lawful and useful employment of life, while in the meantime the Church may be supplied with another man, of equal abilities in all other respects, and of approved orthodoxy as to those things in which the other espouses the wrong side; as there is, upon the other hand, should a truth be neglected that ought to have made a part of the Confession, and a door opened to let in error and division; especially since this needs never occasion schism in the Church, and the erecting of altar against altar, *these public Articles of Faith not being made a term of Christian communion.*

PART III.

THOSE ENDS OF CONFESSIONS WHICH HAVE A RELATION TO ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH.

WE come now to the *third* class of the ends and purposes of Confessions of Faith, namely,—such as regard all the members of that Christian society whose Confessions they are, and as they are designed for the use and advantage of the whole body of the people; and on this head, having no adversaries to deal with, nor any disputes to engage in, we shall detain the reader but a very little time.

I. The principal design of Confessions which regards the whole Christian people, is to provide them with a summary of the true and holy principles of our religion, adapted to their capacities and the circumstances of the Church; whereby they may be assisted in attaining the knowledge of the necessary doctrines of salvation, and improving daily therein. Agreeably to this, the Duke of Wirtemberg gives this reason for publishing his Confession—"That the people might be rightly imbued with doctrine truly pious, and led to the saving knowledge of the Son of God."

We need not insist upon a thing which will be so universally acknowledged as the equity and usefulness of Creeds, if we take them in this view; and that it is of very great advantage to Christians, whose time, fortune, or abilities, may render it unfit for them to study books of greater learning and subtlety, to have the assistance of a well-digested

compend, where the truths of Christianity, as founded upon the Holy Scriptures, are laid before them in their purity and glory,—their dependence upon and connection with one another made easy and plain,—and all the parts of the adorable mystery of man's redemption represented in one view; whereby the weaker memories and judgments of the people are mightily assisted, the united rays of this heavenly light, *the day-spring from on high* overshadowing us, shine forth with the brightest glory, and the infinite wisdom and excellence of Divine Revelation are more easily and fully perceived. And as such works have been attempted by divers hands, so it was certainly fit that particular Churches should be careful to furnish the people with this means of Christian knowledge, namely, *summaries of the doctrines of religion*, of general use to all their people, fitted to promote the unity of the faith among them, and adapted to the condition and circumstances of several ages and countries.

The Reformed Churches, by publishing their Confessions, have furnished the world with many excellent composures of this kind; but we hope we may be allowed to retain a peculiar esteem and value for the Westminster Confession, as in an uncommon degree serviceable to the interest of religion and truth.

The fulness and completeness of this excellent summary of Christian knowledge recommend it. All the great doctrines of our holy religion are brought within so easy a compass, that there is no person but may frequently find leisure to peruse them. Nor do we believe that there is any truth of importance but is there touched; those articles especially which are the principal object of our faith and joy—the grace and love of God, and salvation through the righteousness of Jesus—are held forth in their glory and beauty, and illustrated in their perfect harmony among themselves, and with the other Divine excellencies; and all the parts of our Confession are accommodated to the state of religion, and the heresies and errors which prevail in the world, and fitted to put us in remembrance, and establish us in the PRESENT TRUTH, as the Apostle expresses it. By this means it will much more conduce to inform the understandings of the people, and give them a sufficient notion

of the Christian scheme, in its just extent and purity, than many larger volumes can do.

The doctrines also contained in it are the substantial truths of the Gospel, which tend to purify our hearts and lives, and enlighten our minds with the saving knowledge of the Son of God. Nor does it enter into the subtleties of perverse disputers, or dwindle into any speculations and metaphysical schemes, which conduce not to edification, but, instead of profiting, distract the people with questions nowise useful, but in many respects extremely prejudicial.

We have also always thought there was reason to admire the clearness and perspicuity of the Westminster Confession, which, considering the mysterious nature and great variety of the truths contained in it, the sophistry of adversaries, and the ambiguous variable meanings whereby they confound words and things, was a matter of no small difficulty. And it is one excellent quality of this composure, that all those intricate and scarce intelligible terms of art brought in by the schoolmen, whereby they perplexed divinity, and furnished continual occasion of strife and wrangling, are so cautiously shunned, and scarce one of them used in our Confession; and, which is the chief excellency of all works of this kind, we hope the Scriptures subjoined to every article, with others to the same effect, are convincing evidences of its conformity to the Sacred Oracles, and that it is based upon the sure and infallible foundation of our faith and manners.

All these considerations, and many more which might be added, are a very strong recommendation of the Westminster Confession to the serious and diligent study of all ranks. It is a stupid neglect of God and our own souls, for any to continue in ignorance of their duty to Him, and the mighty things which their Saviour has wrought for them; and as it heightens the impiety, so it will aggravate the fearful condemnation, of those who love darkness, and remain in their blindness, in a land of so much light, where the glorious Gospel shines with so bright a lustre, and the means of knowledge are so easy and useful. It is so universal a neglect of them that makes men wavering and unsettled in their principles,—that exposes them to cunning deceivers, and every wind of perverse doctrine,—and occasions that

coldness of affection and esteem for the noble blessings of the Reformation, and that melancholy indifference whether the friends or enemies of it be successful. And hence it is that people see so little of the divine beauty and harmony of truth, are not animated by a vigorous love and zeal for it, nor are careful to improve its efficacy to the advancing of holiness.

It is a shameful absurdity, for those who value themselves upon all the parts of polite education, and endeavour to excel in the amusements of learning, to be unacquainted with the very speculation of religion, and the fundamental principles of Christianity, which they own with their mouths. It must be surely a reproach to any member of the Church of Scotland to be ignorant of her public Confession; and methinks it is not much less scandalous in those that separate from her, to be unacquainted with her real principles, since, without this, they can never be able to give a just reason of their practice, and it will be reasonably accounted an ignorant schism.

What has been hinted concerning the excellency and usefulness of our Confession, will also hold good with respect to our Larger and Shorter Catechisms, which are admirably fitted to enlighten the people with substantial Gospel truths, and make them knowing and serious Christians. And therefore it cannot be reflected upon, without a just mixture of grief and resentment, that any measures should be taken which have the least tendency to create a disesteem and neglect of these composures among the people; and particularly, that, contrary to all good order and government, as well as to the edification of Christians, attempts should be made to introduce among instructors of youth other catechisms, which, besides the errors and obscurities they may possibly be charged with, and their having no claim to any public authority in the Church, are for no other valuable quality any wise comparable to the Westminster Catechisms, so often ratified by our Assemblies.

II. The Confessions of the Protestant Churches were not only designed to instruct the people in the truth, but to be a safeguard against the infectious breath of error, of which

there is so great hazard everywhere. "We have been pleased," says the Duke of Wirtemberg, in the preface to the Wirtemberg Confession, "to make public this writing, not so much that others might know what kind of doctrine our Churches profess, as that our own people may have a guide to follow, and may know what errors they should guard against. We have determined, therefore, to put forth this written Confession, which contains in few words a summary of truth, that we may preserve, pure and entire, the fountain of true saving doctrine in the Churches of our territory, and guard from corruption the coin which bears the image of our heavenly Father."

There is nothing that a Church should be more solicitously careful about, than to preserve her members pure in the faith, and safe from those poisonous errors that abound in the world. This the excellency of truth,—the fatal effects of error and division upon all the parts of the Christian life,—and the many deceivers who go about, and by various arts endeavour to creep into people's houses, and lead captive unwary souls, make exceeding necessary; and for this end, nothing will prove more beneficial, than an attentive consideration of the public summaries of our religion, in which the truths opposed to the prevailing errors of the time are clearly and forcibly represented; by a right use of which the minds of people may be established in the doctrine which is according to godliness, and armed against all the machinations of adversaries.

It is not pretended that a man should reject a doctrine as false and heretical, *purely because it is not agreeable to our Confession*; since Christians are to try the spirits by the infallible test of the Holy Scriptures, and not by the determination of human composures. But as, on other accounts, such a summary of the Christian religion, framed and published by the authority of the Church, may be very useful to preserve the minds of the people from the contagion of error; so it should at least have this effect, to make them cautious of receiving an opinion contrary to the public standard of a Church of which they are members, and which they think in general so agreeable to the Word of God. This *may create in them a suspicion, that the persons who would*

draw them over to those opinions are cunning seducers who creep into people's houses; and thereby make them justly jealous of what they say and do, and put them upon examining, with the greater diligence, the pretensions of such persons by the Holy Scriptures, and a careful use of all the means for understanding them. And were our Confession duly improved for this purpose, we, who are persuaded of its purity and excellence, cannot but think that it would be a very successful instrument of maintaining the sincerity and uncorruptedness of the *truth as it is in Jesus*.

The people are exposed to a great many snares, which ought to engage them to a diligent use of all means whereby they may avoid them. The Papists, and other enemies of our holy religion, are skilful in all the deceivableness of unrighteousness, and employ very mischievous, and frequently imperceptible methods of corrupting the faith of the Reformation. They can put on sheep's clothing, and even under the mask of higher pretensions than their neighbours to a zeal for truth, and of elevating the doctrine they teach to a greater degree of purity, impose upon the credulous, and pervert weak minds. The natural levity and fickleness of men, especially the more ignorant sort, expose them a ready prey to seducers. The fondness that people have to distinguish themselves from others adds to the temptation. Pride, self-conceit, and a love of popular applause, are fruitful of errors, and put many upon forming parties, and leading the people astray. The lusts of our hearts, and the extreme inclination we have to reconcile our interests and pleasures with our duty, and a disesteem of the law of God with a pretended regard to his grace, make all loose schemes, and particularly Antinomian doctrines, very infectious, and procure too favourable a reception to opinions, books, and pamphlets, which have a tendency that way. And the superior influence which a form of godliness has with the generality beyond the power of it, will, with such persons, render notions which have that form more popular than the substantial truths of the doctrine which is in reality according to godliness. And all these snares have become much more dangerous by that stupid neglect of Christian knowledge, and shameful ignorance, which are to be found with a great number.

Were the means of knowledge which God affords with so distinguishing advantages to this Church, duly improved, and particularly by a diligent use of our Confession and Catechisms, the minds of people would be fortified and established; those ignorant schismatics who rove about the country, would not find so many blind enough to follow them; nor would new and unscriptural notions of any kind meet with so favourable a reception; and the lurking poison, and dangerous tendency, of any books spread through the country, would be sooner discovered, and easier shunned.

[The author illustrates this statement by a brief reference to the controversy which had then arisen respecting "The Marrow of Modern Divinity,"—a controversy which, in so far as it was of local and temporary interest, has long since died away; and in so far as it involved principles of general and permanent importance, cannot be fully discussed in such an incidental and cursory reference as is here made to it. It is only adduced as an illustration, and the general argument is complete without it.—Ed.]

III. A third design of Confessions belonging to this class was, that the Churches might transmit their testimony to the truth unto their latest posterity, and furnish their children with an argument to persevere in the same doctrine, and an encouragement to animate them amidst the greatest dangers and difficulties. To this purpose the Elector Palatine expresses himself in a very pious and affecting strain. For this end, he says, he left behind him that Confession of his Faith: "That my dearest children might be made so much the more free and magnanimous in persevering also with constancy in this my Christian profession, and not allow themselves to be seduced from this faith by any insults and turbulent storms and tempests of danger, such as the many and very heavy trials which I have hitherto endured in the whole course of my government, and which, thanks be to God! I have through His assistance surmounted; nor become more remiss, timid, or negligent in discharging the duty of their office, and propagating this true Christian religion; even as I also, so far as I am personally concerned, have firmly determined, trusting in the grace and help of

Almighty God, to persist and persevere to the last breath of my life, not less nor more negligently than I have hitherto done, in this which I acknowledge and profess to be the Truth."

Our Confessions of Faith are in a peculiar manner useful for this end, and may be in an uncommon degree improved by the members of the Church of Scotland, for engaging them to a vigorous zeal for those blessings transmitted to us by our fathers, and a steadfast adherence to the purity of the Christian doctrine. Let us call to mind, that what we now possess is the faith of the Reformation, which our fathers embraced when their hearts were warmest with the love of God and of truth, and the spirit of that blessed change exerted itself with the most unconstrained and disinterested efficacy. May that light which then broke out from amidst the clouds and darkness of Popery, still irradiate our souls, and be received with the same impartiality and cheerfulness which it then met with! Let us remember their labours for the truth, their unwearied constancy and unshaken fortitude in maintaining and propagating it. Let us follow so noble an example, and blush at the thought of ever deserting these truths, looking upon their ruin or their hazard with indifference or an inglorious neutrality, and suffering them, through our fault, to be lost to posterity.

What mighty things hath God done to preserve our Reformation to us in its primitive extent and vigour! And what a delightful mixture of love and power hath adorned the working of His uncontrolled providence in our behalf! How many schemes of politicians hath he blown up! What contrivances of ambitious and tyrannical princes, who hated the simplicity of our worship, and the liberty of our principles, hath He defeated! What storms of persecution and division too hath he calmed! He supported this Church, while tossed by those furious tempests, and pursued with the unrelenting malice and perfidy of apostates and deserters: and at length, when on the brink of ruin, He brought us to the desired haven.

"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us; then the

waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us a prey to their teeth!" Now what can we render to the Lord for all his benefits, that will prove so acceptable a sacrifice to him, as a high value, zealous love, and steadfast adherence to these precious truths of our Reformation, together with a constant care to adorn our profession of them by the beauties of holiness?

These are also the same truths that were with so much bravery and constancy maintained in the reign of blood and persecution, that many now living once groaned under,—which many gave a testimony to by their sufferings, and by their deaths, and were not prevailed upon to abandon by the allurements and terrors of this world. Seeing, therefore, we are compassed with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run the same race with as much patience and constancy.

Among all polite nations, the great actions of their progenitors were accounted a powerful motive with posterity to pursue the same paths of glory, and to be invigorated by their example. The *imagines majorum* were a source of courage and intrepidity to the Roman youth, and presented to them, in the strongest light, both arguments to persuade and inflame them, and encouragements to animate and support them. Let us in the same manner improve the zeal and fortitude of so many saints and martyrs, who held fast the profession of their faith without wavering, and continued faithful to the death. When the goodness of our merciful God had placed this Church in so happy circumstances, and has delivered it from its enemies, we should now be the more active and diligent to get our souls impressed with the love of truth,—to make advances in the knowledge of Christianity,—to attain a spiritual sight of the Divine beauties and excellences of our holy faith, that may charm all our affections,—and to have the rays of truth daily enlightening our minds and warming our hearts. And thus we shall both make a wise use of present felicity. and arm ourselves with fidelity, courage, and constancy, if ever Divine Providence should suffer those storms and clouds again to gather, which were so wonderfully scattered by the late glorious and happy Revolution.

And, in the last place, with the example of our fathers,

let us call to mind the peculiar obligations this Church is under to remain steadfast in this doctrine, since the Westminster Confession contains the same truths which were professed in our Reformation Confession, to which this nation were solemnly bound by their oath to God in the National Covenant,—that glorious transaction, which, however it may be derided and vilified, will always be reckoned the distinguishing honour of our country by all those who know that true religion is the greatest blessing to a people, and that it is their glory to make profession of it; which glory is heightened, and becomes more illustrious in proportion to the solemnity, the extent, and the zeal of such a profession.

Never, we believe, was there a kingdom, since that of the Jews, that with so much solemnity did, in a public national capacity,—King, Lords, and Commons, consenting,—own their belief of the truth as it is in Jesus, and engage to a steady immovable adherence to its interests, as our Church did by the National Covenant, when it did, before the world, angels, and men, avouch the Lord for its God, and devote itself to His service: so that to us, in so far, what is said of Israel may be applied beyond other countries: “Thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God: The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people to himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.” And in the day that our fathers swore, as in that covenant, to God, (and the same thing will hold with respect to us, while we continue in the same doctrine, and approve of their choice), this Church might have been addressed in the words of Moses to Israel: “Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice: And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people.” And being thus dignified with the advantages of the Jewish Church, we may expect the promised blessings, or fear the threatened ruin, according as we remain steadfast in the ways of truth and holiness. All that has been spoken will aggravate the shame and sin of our apostasy, and heighten the punishment due to perfidious or cowardly deserters. But if we remain faithful in the covenant of God, retain the uncorrupted doctrine

according to godliness, and both believe and obey it, we have reason to hope that it may ever be said of this Church, "Happy art thou, O ISRAEL: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places."

IV. The last use of Confessions was, that they might be subservient to the History of the Church, by transmitting to posterity an authentic and impartial account of the doctrines embraced by the several Churches. The Saxon Churches, in the preface to their Confession, give this reason for their publishing it: "It is necessary that we also should leave to posterity, public testimonies, worthy of credit, against false accusations, lest posterity should judge of us amiss; and that some, admonished by these testimonies, may find out the truth, and be confirmed in right sentiments." How useful and necessary Confessions, and particularly our own, are for this purpose, has been sufficiently manifested in the first part of this work, when we shewed, that it is by such composures alone that we can be enabled to form the justest and most impartial notions of the doctrine, worship, and government of any Church.

V. That we may put an end to this treatise, it remains now only, that we return a very short answer to two particular objections which are brought against our Church with relation to her Confession, and in the mouths of some persons make a great deal of noise.

The first arises from the use which, it is alleged, the Church of Scotland makes of her Confession in the administration of the sacrament of baptism. It may seem almost needless to take notice of the expressions of an author formerly mentioned, because what is there said will appear at first view plainly ridiculous to anybody who is tolerably acquainted with our practice or principles; which it is certain every man ought to be who pretends to condemn and expose them. The thing hinted at is, Sir Richard Steele's dedication to the Pope of the *Account of the state of the Romish religion*, pub-

lished by him; where, speaking of Scotland, he says, "Infants are baptized there, not only into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but into the pure doctrine professed and settled by the Church of Scotland." Were either the practice of our Church, or what is meant by being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, understood, there would have been no place found for this reflection; nor is there any thing with us as to this matter in general, but what is a necessary consequence of the thing itself, and the constant practice of Christians. Before a person be received into the Church by baptism, it is a maxim of common sense, that he should make a profession of the Christian faith; or, in the case of infants, that the parent should do it, and engage to educate them in the knowledge of that religion. A profession of faith and repentance was always made at baptism. Thus it is said of John, that "the people were baptized of him in Jordan, CONFESSING THEIR SINS." Our Saviour, when He gives that solemn commission to his apostles, "To baptize all nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," adds, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you;" and is it to be doubted, but the person to be baptized was to profess his obedience to all these things? We have a remarkable illustration of this matter in the instance of the Ethiopian eunuch, where Philip required an acknowledgment of his faith as a necessary condition of his being baptized; and the eunuch gave it accordingly: "And the eunuch said, See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And, he answered, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And it is well known how plain and full the practice of the primitive Christians was in this matter.

The only plausible objection then is, that our Church too much confines the terms of Christian communion, and encroaches upon the liberties of the people;—that all have a right to baptism who maintain the fundamentals of religion, which many do who differ from us in several articles of faith;—that therefore, to oblige parents who present their children to be baptized, either to profess their own belief of all the

articles of our Confession, or to educate their children in the faith of them, is to establish other bounds of Christian communion than the great Author of our religion has done, and to exclude many from the Church who may be his sincere followers, and ought to be received into it.

In answer to this, we shall just mention these three things.

First, That, in so far as is known to us, there is no act of Assembly, nor even of any inferior Church judicature, establishing the Confession of Faith a term of Christian communion, and appointing ministers to require an assent thereto from Christian parents, in order to their being admitted to all the privileges of Church communion, and particularly the baptism of their children; and therefore there does not seem to be place for the foundation of the objection.

It is true, that, according to the principles laid down and maintained in this treatise, a plain and direct acknowledgment of the essential doctrines of Christianity may be justly required by any Church of all that would lay claim to baptism, and the fellowship of Christians. But our Church has acted so wise and cautious a part, as never to have pretended to condescend upon those precise articles which should be declared fundamental and necessary maxims of our religion, and to pitch upon all those doctrines, the belief of which is indispensably necessary in a sincere Christian, and without which a man cannot possibly be a member of the body of Christ; since that were an attempt of great difficulty, and might be liable to much greater inconveniences than the leaving it unessayed.

Secondly, It must indeed be acknowledged, that, according to the general practice which has prevailed in the Church, when the sacrament of baptism is administered, the parent, or the sponsor, whoever he be, is engaged to educate the child in the principles of the true Reformed Christian religion, as contained in the Holy Scriptures; of which, as is told them, there is an excellent summary in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms. Nor shall we deny but that this may be construed into an obligation on the parent to train up his child in the doctrines of the Westminster Confession, and consequently a declaration, that he believes these doctrines himself. But we hope this cannot be called the

smallest imposition upon a person who heartily embraces all these doctrines, and not only is free from any scruple as to the articles of our standards, but desires to embrace that opportunity of publicly owning, before all the Church, his firm belief and cordial acceptation of these articles as the truths of Jesus, and the doctrines of that pure faith which he receives with his heart, and acknowledges with the mouth. Surely it were a very unreasonable hardship, to refuse that person an opportunity every way so fit for it, of making a profession of the faith of the Gospel, as it appears to him in its greatest light and purity. Now it is very justly supposed, that all persons who know the common practice of the Church, and yet move no objections, are of this disposition, and have these inclinations.

In the *third* place, As there is no established rule, nor any Act of Assembly, confining the benefits of baptism to the belief of the several articles of our Confession, and excluding from a participation of this ordinance all persons who may in some things differ from us; so there was no ground in fact ever given to a person to complain of an arbitrary imposition upon him in this respect; nor can any man, so far as we know, allege, that he acquainted a minister that he had scruples as to some articles of our Confession, or was of a contrary opinion to them, and therefore that he could neither profess his own belief of them, nor engage to educate his child in them, and was thereupon denied access to this sacrament. On the other hand, there have been several instances of persons, who, upon their desire, were gratified in this particular; while none had ever reason to complain of a refusal. From which consideration, it is hoped, the groundlessness of the clamour raised by our enemies will evidently appear.

VI. There is only one thing further to be noticed, and truly it is so trifling that it would merit no regard, did not our adversaries, with a great deal of confidence, boast of it—namely, the flat contradiction which they allege there is betwixt the principles which we now fall in with concerning civil government, together with the conduct of this Church since the revolution, and these words of the 23d chapter of

the Confession of Faith, *Of the Civil Magistrate*, § 4: "Infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrate's just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him."

This indeed has been the principle of our, and I believe of all other Churches. Nor could they maintain the contrary, without unhinging all government in Heathen, Mahometan, and Popish countries, which were very absurd,—and without denying the submission and obedience to the Roman Cæsars, which Christ and his apostles paid them. But this can never, in the smallest degree, be inconsistent with our having disclaimed all allegiance to the abdicated, or, in the style of our Acts of Parliament, the forfeited King James, and, since his death, to the Pretender to the British crown; except it can be proved, that we acknowledge, that the Pretender has a just and legal authority of the supreme magistrate, which, because of his infidelity, we make void. This were indeed to contradict the alleged articles of the Westminster Confession. But since we are persuaded that he has no right or title whatsoever,—that he is not a magistrate,—and has no manner of authority in these islands, the people of which owe him not the least obedience, it may be alleged, that we injure him; but there is not the smallest colour for charging us with contradicting the principles of our own Confession, when we utterly renounce and disclaim his imaginary kingship.

It is not simply because he is a Papist, that we pay no allegiance to that pretended king, but because he has now no right to the British throne, whatever be his religion; any title which otherwise he might have had, being vacated and annulled by those who, according to our principles, had an undoubted power to limit the succession of the crown, as appeared necessary for the public good; as all the plea which the late King James could have made for himself and his posterity, was entirely destroyed by his tyrannical invasion of the fundamental laws and constitutions of government, whereby he was exposed to a just and necessary forfeiture.

Wherefore, though no doubt his embracing that abominable idolatry, and being so deeply impressed with the

cruel and impious maxims of that false and bloody religion, gives us a higher relish of the infinite goodness of a merciful God, in establishing upon the throne our present excellent Sovereign King George, and inspires with a great ardour our sincere wishes for the stability and glory of his reign,—shows us, in a more shining light, the blessings of the Protestant succession in his illustrious family,—and increases our horror at the dismal prospect of things, if ever an avenging God should send the Pretender to be a scourge to these nations: yet we do not change our principles, by pretending that his infidelity makes void his just and legal authority; for to us there does not appear so much as the least shadow of any authority which that person can lay claim to in Britain, but very plain demonstrations of the contrary.

We have now given an account of all the different uses and purposes of Confessions of Faith, which we thought of any importance,—have endeavoured to illustrate, explain, and vindicate them, and to consider all the material objections which we could imagine might be brought against them,—and so we have finished all that was at first proposed in this Essay.

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APPENDIX.

I. The "Uses of Creeds and Confessions of Faith" may be illustrated by the consequences which have resulted from the abandonment of them, and by the anticipations of those who, exulting in the freedom already achieved, look forward to a still more glorious emancipation from authority in matters of religious belief in the future history of the Church.

The work of M. ATHANASE COQUEREL, entitled "Le Christianisme Experimental," and translated by the Rev. D. Davidson, affords a case in point. After stating that "not one single minister" of the Reformed Protestant Church in France, "since the year 1802 (and, in fact, long before), has been, or could be, called to sign the former Creeds," and that they preserve "the ancient Creeds simply as venerable records of the science and piety of their fathers"—he proceeds to shew that the revolution thus effected, however great, and, in his view, salutary, was far from being complete, and devotes the Sixth Book of his work to a view of "The Future of Christianity in time and beyond time;" where he treats of "the gradual emancipation of Christianity, *first*, from Discipline; *secondly*, from a Clerical Hierarchy; *thirdly*, from Authority; *fourthly*, from Forms; *fifthly*, from the Letter of Revelation; *sixthly*, from Dogmas:"—so that the abrogation of Creeds would seem to be only

the commencement of a process of further development, and interminable change.

The effects of a similar change in Switzerland are well illustrated in Mr Robert Haldane's "Letter to M. Chenevière."

Some instructive hints on the same subject may be derived from the experience of Congregational Churches in our own country, with respect especially to the difficulty of exercising discipline in the absence of an explicit Confession of Faith. This is strikingly illustrated by a large pamphlet, published in 1845, and entitled "The Entire Correspondence between the four Congregational Churches in Glasgow, and the Congregational Churches at Hamilton, Bellshill, Bridgeton, Cambuslang, and Ardrossan." This pamphlet was published under the superintendence of the late Dr WARDLAW.

II. In Archdeacon BLACKBURN'S "Confessional"—the argument is directed chiefly against the practice of *subscription*, as if it were inconsistent with Christian liberty, and the progress of free enquiry. He overlooks, or does not sufficiently regard, the following considerations : *first*, that the use of Creeds and Confessions as a test of orthodoxy, is only one of several important ends which they are designed to serve ; *secondly*, that all the other ends of Creeds and Confessions are dependent, to a large extent, on their being solemnly subscribed by the Office-bearers of the Church ; *thirdly*, that subscription to Creeds and Confessions has never been required from private members of the Church, but only from Office-bearers, who may be reasonably presumed to have studied their contents, and to be qualified to give an intelligent assent to them ; and *fourthly*, that Office-bearers themselves are not precluded from further enquiry, nor debarred from the public expression of their mature convictions, but bound only to demit their charge when they can no longer fulfil conscientiously the conditions on which they were admitted to office and emolument in any particular Church.

III. The theory of Bishop BURNET, in his "Exposition of the Thirty-nine Articles," that they are to be regarded, in the

case of the laity, merely as Articles of Church communion, but in the case of the Clergy, who are required to subscribe them "*willingly, and ex animo, and to acknowledge all and every article to be agreeable to the Word of God,* as a declaration of their own opinion, and not as a bare obligation to silence," might be admitted, were it not accompanied with explanations which import that the "Articles may have different senses, and that if the words will bear them, there is no prevarication in subscribing them so";—a statement which might be applied to vindicate the right claimed by the Tractarian Divines of subscribing them in a "non-natural sense."

IV. The Use of Creeds and Confessions as a *bond of union, and a basis for communion*, between the different Reformed Churches, may be illustrated by the various "Collections of Confessions" which have been published from time to time, with the view of shewing their substantial agreement in regard to all the fundamental Articles of Faith. The following works may be consulted:—

———"Harmonia Confessionum Fidei Orthodoxarum et Reformatarum Ecclesiarum, quæ, in præcipuis quibusque Europæ regnis, nationibus, et provinciis, sacram Evangelii doctrinam purè profitentur." Published at Geneva in 1581, in the name of the French and Belgian Churches.

——An English translation of the "Harmonia" was published at Cambridge in 1586, and again at London in 1643. A new edition, revised and considerably enlarged by the Rev. Peter Hall, A.M., a Rector in the Church of England, was published at London in 1842, entitled "The Harmony of Protestant Confessions, exhibiting the Faith of the Churches of Christ, Reformed after the pure and holy doctrine of the Gospel, throughout Europe."

——"Corpus et Syntagma Confessionum Fidei, quæ, in diversis Regnis et Nationibus, Ecclesiarum nomine fuerunt authenticè editæ, in celeberrimis Conventibus exhibitæ, publicæque Auctoritate comprobatae." Edited by Gaspar Laurentius, and published in 1612: and again, with considerable alterations, at Geneva in 1654.

—— “Sylloge Confessionum sub tempus Reformandæ Ecclesiæ editarum.” Published at Oxford in 1804, at the suggestion of Bishop Cleaver; and reprinted, as revised by Bishop Lloyd, in 1827.

—— “Corpus Librorum Symbolicorum, qui in Ecclesiâ Reformatorum Auctoritatem Publicam obtinuerunt.” Edited by J. C. G. Augusti, and published at Elberfeld in 1827.

—— “Collectio Confessionum in Ecclesiis Reformatis Publicatarum.” Edited by Dr H. A. Niemeyer, and published at Leipsic in 1840.

—— “The Scriptural Unity of Protestant Churches exhibited in their Published Confessions.” Edited by Rev. D. Stuart, D.D., and published at Dublin in 1835.

—— “A Collection of Confessions of Faith, Catechisms, Directories, Books of Discipline, &c., of Public Authority in the Church of Scotland.” By Professor Wm. Dunlop, Edinburgh, 1719; a work which is now scarce and high-priced, and which was enriched with the valuable preface on “The Ends and Uses of Confessions,” now reprinted.

V. ACTS OF PARLIAMENT AND ASSEMBLY, relating to the Westminster Confession.

WILL AND MARY, PARL. I. SESS. 2, ACT 5.

Act ratifying the Confession of Faith, and settling Presbyterian Church Government.

Our Sovereign Lord and Lady, the King and Queen's Majesties, and three Estates of Parliament, conceiving it to be their bounden duty, after the great deliverance that God hath lately wrought for this Church and kingdom, in the first place to settle and secure therein the true Protestant religion, according to the truth of God's Word, as it hath of a long time been professed within this land; as also the government of Christ's Church within this nation, agreeable to the Word of God, and most conducive to the advancement of true

piety and godliness, and the establishing of peace and tranquillity within this realm; and that by an article of the Claim of Right, it is declared, "That Prelacy, and the superiority of any office in the Church above presbyters, is, and hath been, a great and unsupportable grievance and trouble to this nation, and contrary to the inclinations of the generality of the people, ever since the Reformation, they having reformed from Popery by presbyters, and therefore ought to be abolished;" likeas, by an act of the last session of this Parliament, Prelacy is abolished:

Therefore their Majesties, with advice and consent of the said three Estates, do hereby revive, ratify, and perpetually confirm, all laws, statutes, and acts of Parliament, made against Popery and Papists, and for the maintenance and preservation of the true reformed Protestant religion, and for the true Church of Christ within this kingdom, in so far as they confirm the same, or are made in favour thereof. Likeas they, by these presents, ratify and establish the Confession of Faith, now read in their presence, and voted and approved by them as the public and avowed Confession of this Church, containing the sum and substance of the doctrine of the Reformed Churches.

As also they do establish, ratify, and confirm, the Presbyterian Church government and discipline; that is to say, the government of the Church by kirk-sessions, presbyteries, provincial synods, and general assemblies, ratified and established by the 114th Act, Ja. VI., Parl. 12, anno 1592, intituled, *Ratification of the liberty of the true Kirk*, &c.; and thereafter received, by the general consent of this nation, to be the only government of Christ's Church within this kingdom; reviving, renewing, and confirming the foresaid act of Parliament. . . .

WILL. AND MARY, PARL. I. SESS. 4, ACT 22.

Act for settling the quiet and peace of the Church.

Our Sovereign Lord and Lady, the King and Queen's Majesties, with advice and consent of the Estates of Parlia-

ment, ratify, approve, and perpetually confirm, the fifth act of the second session of this current Parliament, intituled, *An Act ratifying the Confession of Faith, and settling Presbyterian Church government*, in the whole heads, articles, and clauses thereof.

And do further statute and ordain, That no person be admitted, or continued for hereafter, to be a minister or preacher within this Church, unless that he — subscribe the Confession of Faith, ratified in the foresaid fifth Act of the second session of this Parliament, declaring the same to be the Confession of his Faith, and that he owns the doctrine therein contained to be the true doctrine, which he will constantly adhere to; and likewise, that he owns and acknowledges Presbyterian Church government, as settled by the foresaid fifth Act of the second session of this Parliament, to be the only government of this Church; and that he will submit thereto, and concur therewith, and never endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or subversion thereof.

And their Majesties, with advice and consent foresaid, statute and ordain, that uniformity of worship, and of the administration of all public ordinances within this Church, be observed by all the said ministers and preachers, as the same are at present performed, and allowed therein, or shall be hereinafter declared by the authority of the same; and that no minister or preacher be admitted, or continued for hereafter, unless that he subscribe to observe, and do actually observe, the foresaid uniformity.

WILL. AND MARY, PARL. I. SESS. 2, ACT 17.

Act for Visitation of Universities, Colleges, and Schools.

Our Sovereign Lord and Lady, the King and Queen's Majesties, and the three Estates of Parliament, considering how necessary it is for the advancement of religion and learning, and for the good of the Church, and peace of the kingdom, that the universities, colleges, and schools, be provided and served with pious, able, and qualified professors,

principals, regents, masters, and others bearing office therein, well affected to their Majesties, and the established government of Church and State: Therefore their Majesties, with advice of the said three Estates of Parliament, do statute, ordain, and enact, That from this time forth, no professors, principals, regents, masters, or others bearing office in any university, college, or school, within this kingdom, be either admitted or allowed to continue in the exercise of their said functions, but such as do acknowledge and profess, and shall subscribe to the Confession of Faith, ratified and approved by this present Parliament.

The fifth act of the second session of King William and Queen Mary is ratified by the second act, sess. 8, King William, and by the third act of Queen Anne 1702, and by the second act of the first session of the first Parliament Queen Anne.

QUEEN ANNE, PARL. I. SESS. 4, ACT 6.

Act for Securing the Protestant Religion, and Presbyterian Church Government.

Her Majesty, with advice and consent of the said Estates of Parliament, doth hereby establish and confirm the true Protestant religion, and the worship, discipline, and government of this Church, to continue without any alteration to the people of this land, in all succeeding generations: And more especially, her Majesty, with advice and consent foresaid, ratifies, approves, and for ever confirms, the fifth act of the second session of the first Parliament of King William and Queen Mary, intituled, *Act ratifying the Confession of Faith, and settling Presbyterian Church Government*, with the hail other acts of Parliament relating thereto, in prosecution of the declaration of the Estates of this kingdom, containing the Claim of Right, bearing date the eleventh of April, one thousand six hundred and eighty-nine.

And her Majesty, with advice and consent foresaid, expressly provides and declares, That the foresaid true Pro-

testant religion contained in the above-mentioned Confession of Faith, with the form and purity of worship presently in use within this Church, and its Presbyterian Church government and discipline, that is to say, the government of the Church by kirk-sessions, presbyteries, provincial synods, and general assemblies, all established by the foresaid acts of Parliament, pursuant to the Claim of Right, shall remain and continue unalterable; and that the said Presbyterian government shall be the only government of the Church within the kingdom of Scotland.

And further, for the greater security of the foresaid Protestant religion, and of the worship, discipline, and government of this Church, as above established, her Majesty, with advice and consent foresaid, statutes and ordains, That the universities and colleges of St Andrew's, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh, as now established by law, shall continue within this kingdom for ever; and that in all time coming, no professors, principals, regents, masters, or others bearing office in any university, college, or school, within this kingdom, be capable, or be admitted, or allowed to continue in the exercise of their said functions, but such as shall own and acknowledge the civil government in manner prescribed, or to be prescribed, by the acts of Parliament: As also, that, before or at their admissions, they do and shall acknowledge and profess, and shall subscribe to the foresaid Confession of Faith, as the Confession of their Faith; and that they will practise and conform themselves to the worship presently in use in this Church, and submit themselves to the government and discipline thereof, and never endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or subversion of the same, and that before the respective presbyteries of the bounds, by whatsoever gift, presentation, or provision, they may be thereto provided.

And further, her Majesty, with advice foresaid, expressly declares and statutes, That none of the subjects of this kingdom shall be liable to, but all and every one of them for ever free of, any oath, test, or subscription, within this kingdom, contrary to, or inconsistent with, the foresaid true Protestant religion, and Presbyterian Church government, worship, and discipline, as above established; and that the

same, within the bounds of this Church and kingdom, shall never be imposed upon, or required of them in any sort.

And lastly, That after the decease of her present Majesty, (whom God long preserve), the Sovereign succeeding to her in the royal government of the kingdom of Great Britain, shall, in all time coming, at his or her accession to the crown, swear and subscribe, that they shall inviolably maintain and preserve the foresaid settlement of the true Protestant religion, with the government, worship, discipline, rights, and privileges, of this Church, as above established by the laws of this kingdom, in prosecution of the Claim of Right.

And it is hereby statute and ordained, That this act of Parliament, with the establishment therein contained, shall be held and observed in all time coming as a fundamental and essential condition of any treaty or union to be concluded betwixt the two kingdoms, without any alteration thereof, or derogation thereto, in any sort, for ever: As also that this act of Parliament, and settlement therein contained, shall be insert and repeated in any act of Parliament that shall pass, for agreeing and concluding the foresaid treaty or union betwixt the two kingdoms; and that the same shall be therein expressly declared to be a fundamental and essential condition of the said treaty or union in all time coming.

Accordingly this act is declared to be a fundamental and essential condition of the union, and inserted in the act of Parliament of Scotland, intituled, *An act ratifying and approving the treaty of union of the two kingdoms of Scotland and England*; and in the act of the Parliament of England, intituled, *An act for an union of the two kingdoms of England and Scotland*. . . . And on the 22d day of September 1714, his Majesty, in his first general council, did take and subscribe the following oath :—

“I George, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c., do faithfully promise and swear, That I shall inviolably maintain and preserve the settlement of the true Protestant religion, with the government, worship, discipline, rights, and privileges, of the Church of Scotland, as established by the laws made there, in prosecution of the Claim of Right; and particularly by an act, intituled, *Act for*

securing the Protestant religion, and Presbyterian Church government, and by the acts passed in the Parliaments of both kingdoms for the union of the two kingdoms. So help me, God.

“GEORGE REX.”

ASSEMBLY 1690, ACT 7.

For retaining Soundness and Unity of Doctrine.

The General Assembly appoints, That all probationers licensed to preach, all entrants into the ministry, and all other ministers and elders received into communion with us in Church government, be obliged to subscribe their approbation of the Confession of Faith, approved by former General Assemblies of this Church, and ratified in the second session of the current Parliament. And they recommend this to the diligence of the several presbyteries; and appoint them to record their diligence thereanent in their respective registers.

ASSEMBLY 1700, ACT 11.

Act anent subscribing the Confession of Faith.

The General Assembly appoints, that all ministers and ruling elders belonging to this National Church subscribe the *Confession of Faith*, as the Confession of their Faith, according to the act of Assembly 1690, and the *Formula* agreed upon in the Assembly held in the year 1694, act 11.

In the Act of the Assembly “approving the Confession of Faith,” (August 1647), which is not recited by Professor Dunlop, it is declared, “that the Assembly understands some parts of the second article of the 31st chapter, *only of kirks not settled, or constituted in point of government.*” With this important limitation, the article respecting the Civil Magistrate was originally received; and more recently, in June 1846, the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland issued an “Act anent Questions and

Formula," in which the following *declaratory statement* is embodied :—"The General Assembly, in passing this act, think it right to declare, that, while the Church firmly maintains the same scriptural principles as to the duties of nations and their rulers in reference to true religion and the Church of Christ, for which she has hitherto contended, she **DISCLAIMS INTOLERANT OR PERSECUTING PRINCIPLES**, and does not regard her Confession of Faith, or any portion thereof, when fairly interpreted, as favouring intolerance or persecution, or consider that her office-bearers, by subscribing it, profess any principles **INCONSISTENT WITH LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE AND THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT.**"

By a recent Act of Parliament, Professors, not belonging to the Theological Faculty, are relieved from the obligation to subscribe the Formula.

EDITOR.

THE END.

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